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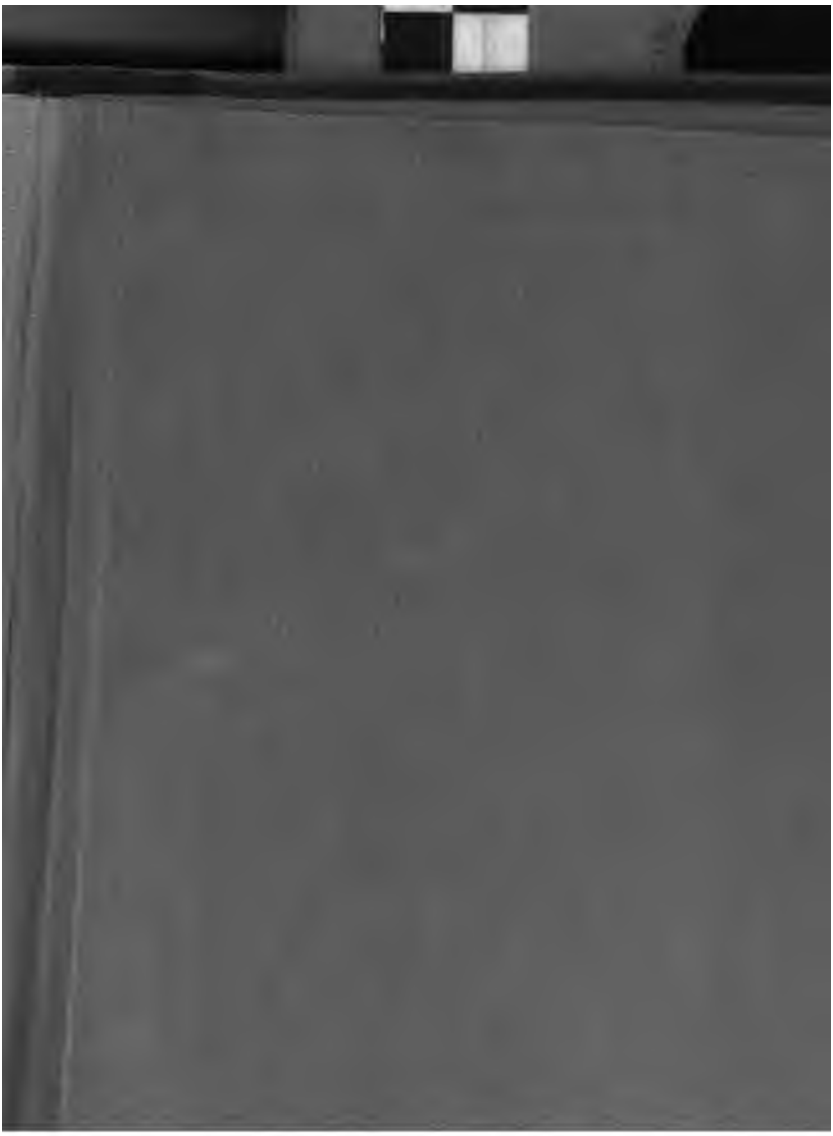
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# A RACE WITH RUIN



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BY

HEADON HILL

AUTHOR OF

"GUILTY GOLD," "CAGED," "BY A HAIR'S BREADTH,"

"THE DUKE DECIDES," ETC., ETC.

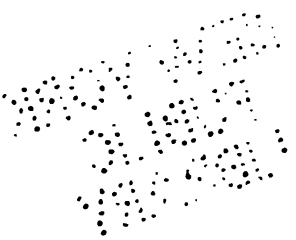
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# CHAPTER I

## A "NOBLE" JACKAL

GAIETY and grief; poverty and wealth; glutted satiety and ravening hunger; squalid virtue and glittering crime. Where more than in the Strand will you find these sharp human contrasts jostling each other so closely that the laughter might well be drowned in tears?

At half-past seven on a June evening, when the theatre traffic was beginning to thicken, and the newsboys, freshly supplied with pink "specials," were chanting the old but never stale refrain of "All the winners," a smart private hansom drew with much jingle of silver collar-bells to the kerb outside Romano's restaurant.

From it there alighted two men in evening dress —one tall and sallow-skinned, with shining black hair cropped close, though, to have been in keeping with the face, it ought to have hung down in ringlets; the other thick-set and bull-necked, with a brick-dust complexion and coarse, full lips that "told a tale" in more senses than one.

The former was Mr. Leopold Tannadyce, the owner of the vehicle which had brought him and his friend Lord Hooligan to dine before finishing the night elsewhere. He called himself a "financial

agent," but the clients who submitted to be shorn in his palatial offices in Waterloo Place thought and spoke of him by quite another name.

"All-devouring shark" was an epithet which on more than one occasion had been applied to Mr. Tannadyce in the law courts.

In point of fact, he was no more and no less than that product of latter-day luxury, a West End money-lender—the richest and most successful, perhaps, of all the fraternity who have their clutch on the stately homes of England.

"Give Skinner his orders, old man," he said to his companion, and strode into the restaurant without waiting. He knew that his behest, or any other behest that he might impose in that quarter, would be faithfully carried out. The bull-necked peer, whom he had first stripped of his patrimony, was now as much his servant as was the valet who every morning strove with the skill of an artist to make him look less like a Jew.

Lord Hooligan, in language which the driver himself would have blushed to use, gave instructions for the cab to pick them up at a certain notorious night club at three in the morning.

"And see here, Skinner, you'd better keep one of the nags quiet to-morrow," added his lordship. "It's very likely I may have to drive out to Epsom to-morrow night to be ready for an early trial on the Downs."

The man touched his hat and drove off, and Hooligan turned to follow his patron. But he had only taken two steps towards the brilliantly lighted entrance when a hand was laid upon his sleeve—a hand encased in a shabby suède glove, with unclean fingers showing through the broken ends.

"Just a moment, 'Arry," said a tremulous but not unmusical voice. "If you've had a good day

you might spare me 'arf a sov, or at least five bob. It ain't so long ago as I used to dine in there with you, and now, heaven knows, I'm pretty nearly starving."

Hooligan wheeled round, a sharp curse on his lips for the hollow-eyed female wreck who had accosted him. "Now, you jolly well hook it, unless you want to be locked up," he snarled as he shook her off. "I ain't going to stand any of your nonsense. I was sick of it a year ago; that's why I chucked you."

"And I thought I was your wife—your lawful married wife," the poor soul began to whimper.

"That was your look-out—for not inquiring into the profession of the fellow who performed the ceremony," Hooligan sneered. "Come, be off," he added, "or you'll pass the night in the cells at Bow Street."

He pointed to an advancing policeman, and the woman melted into the throng with a choking sob. Presently, as she recovered somewhat, a look of cunning came into the faded eyes. "Henceforth I shall treat him as an enemy," she murmured. "I'm glad I overheard about that midnight drive to Epsom as I came up. He's got some wicked game on, I'll be bound. If I could find out what it was it might give me a hold over him."

In the meanwhile Hooligan was met on the threshold of the vestibule of the restaurant by Tannadyce, who had come out to see what had kept him. The money-lender had witnessed the conclusion of the interview, and his face was crinkled with an evil grin.

"Having a turn-up with the missus, eh, Hooly?" he sniggered.

"Don't call her that, old man; I won't stand it even from you," was the sulky reply.

"Well, hurry up, and let's get to work on the

menu," said Tannadyce, leading the way into the sumptuous dining-room. "But, my stars! what a fearful ruin she's made of herself. No one would ever believe that she was the once elegant Bessie Beckford, doing her four turns a night at the best halls."

The pair made for a table at the far end of the apartment—near the gallery where a hidden orchestra was discoursing sweet strains of music. A string band is a useful accompaniment to a conversation that is likely to become private and confidential.

But it was not till an obsequious waiter had served the soup and uncorked the champagne that Mr. Tannadyce resumed the subject that had begun to engross him in the cab.

"So you think that Roylance's colt is certain to win the New Century Handicap?" he asked carelessly, but with a furtive glance at his companion that belied his tone.

"Barring accidents, Starlight is a dead snip," the scion of the peerage replied. "The funny thing is, the stable don't know yet what a real good thing they've got. They'll know it fast enough the day after to-morrow, when the horse is to be tried. I think I'd better drive down in the small hours and get a peep at the trial, as you seem inclined to back the horse."

Tannadyce emitted a grating laugh. "I never made a bet in my life, and I'm not going to begin now, thank you," he rejoined. "But for all that, I am interested, very deeply interested, not in the horse, but in Sir Charles Roylance. He would win a lot of money if the chance came off, eh?"

Lord Hooligan frowned as he savagely split open a quail that had just been brought to him. To the ruined nobleman the idea of any one winning money

was gall and wormwood, and he was obliged to admit that the success of Starlight would mean an enormous coup to the young baronet, his owner.

"Roylance will just rake in the shekels hand over hand," was his elegant way of putting it. "The stakes alone are a pretty plum, but he won't leave it at that. The colt being one people know nothing about, he'll be able to back it to win a fortune."

"Then the horse must lose," the money-lender said, with the serene air of a Napoleon issuing an edict.

It was Hooligan's turn to laugh now—the malicious laugh that a well-informed hireling flings at the ignorance of a hated employer. For though the penniless peer was dependent for every crust he ate on Tannadyce in return for "services rendered," he did not forget to whom he owed his ruin.

"Come, Tann, you're getting a bit above yourself," he jeered. "You can't creep into stables and poison horses nowadays, and Roylance's trainer and jockey are both as straight as they make 'em. If the horse is the best horse he'll win right enough, and all your money-bags won't stop him."

Mr. Leopold Tannadyce liked good wine and soft raiment, but he used them largely as a means to an end, and just now he was more absorbed in a certain scheme of his than in the pleasures of the table. Leaning back in his chair, he sipped his creaming Moët, and gazed upwards at the palms that veiled the musicians, unconsciously seeking inspiration from a plaintive waltz of Strauss. He was wondering how far he could trust the aristocratic scoundrel in front of him.

"I say, Hooly, you're not too fond of Roylance, are you?" he inquired, having come to a decision.

"Loathe the beggar," was the reply. "He's a snob. He gives himself airs because he's not quite

penniless yet. He looked me over at Kempton the other day as if I was something startling. I'll help to pull him down, if that's what you want; but you can't nobble his horse, you know."

Tannadyce bent his head lower over the snowy napery and glittering plate. "Then here's a job for you," he whispered. "If we can't stop the horse from winning we can prevent the owner from winning much over him, I imagine. I'm not in the racing swim, but there is such a thing as spoiling the betting, isn't there?"

Lord Hooligan raised his head with reluctant admiration in his bloodshot eyes. "You're a fair caution, Tann," was his comment. "Yes, if Roylance were forestalled he wouldn't be able to back the horse for a big sum, and consequently he couldn't make much out of the affair. It might be managed in several ways. The simplest plan would be for you to back Starlight yourself to win a niceish stake."

"I've told you I won't do that," said the moneylender decidedly. "A far simpler plan, and one more to my liking, would be to make the public back the horse and keep myself safe either way. That is, within the realm of possibility, eh?"

"It ain't so easy to lumber the public on to a good horse as it is to lumber 'em off one," replied Hooligan sententiously.

"If you can't find a way I shall have to shunt you and find some one with more resource," said Tannadyce angrily.

"Don't get angry, old man; I didn't say I couldn't do the trick," replied his lordship, perceiving that he had gone far enough. "How'd it be if you were to acquire an interest—as sleeping partner, you know—in a tipster's business? If you'll leave it to me I'll make inquiries and find one in low water.

Then we can work the affair as we like, and flood the country with the tip of Starlight as a dead cert."

"That would have the effect of sending the horse to short odds."

"Properly worked it would, and I'd engage to see to that."

"Then you can draw on me up to two hundred pounds for it, and put it in hand at once." Tannadyce responded more affably. "The fact is, I hold mortgages on every stick and stone Roylance possesses, and I've set my heart on foreclosing. I want his place, Roylance Abbey, to live in myself, now that I've made my money; but it will slip through my fingers if he makes a big haul and pays me off."

Delighted with the prospect of a commission that would yield plentiful pickings, Hooligan assured his host that there was no fear of any miscarriage—that he would have Starlight first favourite for the New Century Handicap almost as soon as Sir Charles knew what a good horse he had got.

"Fool as he is, he won't rush off to back his colt in large sums at once, you see, for fear of doing what you're going to do for him—spoiling the business. He'll mean to put it on by driblets through a commissioner, but we'll have the public laying 6 to 4 on the horse before he can play that game," Hooligan pointed out.

"Good lad," ejaculated the usurer, his temper quite restored. "And you will see the trial of the horse and make sure that I'm not wasting my coin?"

"If you'll let me have the cab to-morrow night, so as to be on the Downs at sunrise."

"Take it, dear boy, by all means."

The orchestra glided from a gay mazurka into

one of Tschaikowsky's weird themes as Tannadyce tossed a couple of sovereigns on to the bill and bade the waiter keep the change. And while the two confederates filed out of the gorgeous restaurant on their way to the Empire, a woman who had trod the same rich carpet in all the pride of beauty and popularity a short year ago was going supperless to bed in a dingy lodging off the Waterloo Road.

But she, too, had laid her plans to be on Epsom Downs at the same hour as the titled ruffian who had deceived and deserted her.

"Thank heaven, the child died," she wailed, as she knelt by her wretched bed in the desolation of despair. "It sets me free, somehow, to get square on him. I'll never leave him till I've dragged him down and made him feel what hunger is."

## CHAPTER II

### "PARKER'S LIGHTNING FINALS"

SUCH was the legend, neatly written on card, which was affixed to the door of an office up two flights of narrow, creaking stairs in Red Lion Court, Fleet Street. On the morning after Tannadyce and Lord Hooligan's confidential chat at Romano's, the aforesaid office, which was barely furnished with an ink-splashed table, three windsor chairs, and sundry files of sporting newspapers, had two occupants—an old man and a girl of such surpassing beauty that it lost nothing by the plainness of her well-worn black dress.

She had just finished reading aloud several extracts from *Ruff's Guide to the Turf*, to which her companion had listened intently, with a curious look of abstraction on his expressionless face.

"At the weights I regard Iconoclast as certain to win the Datchet Stakes at Windsor next week," said the old man after a pause. "You had better send out advice letters to our postal subscribers, Nance. It would be a good thing, too, to put an attractive advertisement in the papers announcing that we have something very special."

The girl made no answer, but looked sadly across the table at the impressive figure opposite. The

look was not returned, and, indeed, they never exchanged glances, these two, as they conversed, constant and familiar as was their intercourse. For the man was stone blind.

"And then for to-day," he went on, without heeding her silence, "I should like to wire our telegraphic subscribers Beeswax for the fourth race at Leicester, as a real good thing. We have eleven clients on that list, I think?"

"That is the number," the girl replied.

Something strained in the cadence of her voice struck her hearer, who had all a blind man's sensitiveness to sound. "Why, what's wrong, Nance?" he asked quickly.'

She rose and went round to him, laying a shapely hand caressingly on the threadbare sleeve of his tweed coat. He had the remains of a massive frame, and a rugged, sun-tanned face that spoke of an outdoor existence in former days. Delicately chiselled features and an unconscious dignity of gesture would have singled him out amid other surroundings as a distinguished personage. As it was, the printers' devils who saw him led along Fleet Street to and from his office spoke of him as "the blind old toff," little guessing his occupation.

"Father, dear, I'm afraid we're in rather a bad way," the girl murmured, bravely choking down her sobs. "I have got just enough money to stamp the letters, but if we are to send wires to the 'specials' I shall have to pawn my bangle—my last poor little remnant of jewellery. And the advertisements are quite out of the question."

"Great heavens! and has it come to this?" the old man cried hoarsely. "Well, you must pawn the bangle, my child. We have been honest about this business, and we'll be honest about it to the end. The subscribers have paid for my advice by telegram,

and telegrams they shall have. Then we must retire to the workhouse, you and I, and leave the field to rogues who don't know a horse from an elephant and take no pains to study 'form.' It's hard lines, Nance, to find one's last plank give way."

Poor Chesney Beauchamp! Planks had been giving way under him ever since the day, fifty years before, when as a boy at Harrow he had borrowed ten shillings from his house-master's gardener to back a Derby favourite that came in last. Heir to a fine old estate in the Midlands, the mania imbibed in boyhood had followed him on his coming into his inheritance, and acre by acre the lands of his forefathers had been sold to pay his racing debts, for Beauchamp of Beauchamp Grange was nothing if not the soul of honour.

Then at last had come a dreadful day when, after years of struggle, the Squire had departed from his ruined home, never to return, leaving everything to his creditors. He had just twenty pounds in his pocket after satisfying all claims. The one drop of consolation in his bitter cup was that his wife had died before the crash, and that his daughter Nance alone had to share his misfortunes.

Sanguine ever, he had at once embarked on the only means of gaining a livelihood that attracted him. Vain of his fancied knowledge of horce-racing—that "little knowledge" that had proved his undoing—he had conceived the idea of selling his advice to the public; and so, though he would never own to the designation, a once respected country gentleman had become a tipster—proprietor of the concern which quick-witted Nance, loyally staunch to her father despite her loathing for the work, had christened "Parker's Lightning Finals."

The thing never had a chance from the first. Ill-

luck pursued Chesney Beauchamp into exile, and crowned his disasters with the awful curse of blindness. His sight, which had been failing for some time, left him entirely the week after they were established in the dingy office in Red Lion Court, and plucky Nance had practically run the miserable business. That is to say, she had to attend to the correspondence, dispatch telegrams, and read aloud to her father the racing intelligence on which he based his opinions.

But for all the girl's shrewd helpfulness the "office" had never earned more than the few shillings necessary to keep body and soul together in the humble lodgings which the Beauchamps had taken at Islington. "Parker's Lightning Finals" had all sorts of adverse influences to contend with—lack of funds for anything but occasional advertisements of meagre limits, a scrupulous honesty which forbade the scoring of "successes" by sending half a dozen different tips to as many clients for the same race, and, above all, an entire innocence of those darker phases of Turf life so essential to those who would succeed.

And now the end had come, and starvation stared father and daughter in the face.

"Nance, dear," said the blind man nervously, "I've thought of just one way of getting a little money to carry on with. How would it be to write and ask Charley Roylance, as an old neighbour and the son of an old friend, to—er—make a small advance of, say, a hundred pounds?"

A quick flush mantled in the girl's cheek, and she had much ado to steady her voice. "Oh, father, I would rather go homeless and hungry than do that," she exclaimed. "I don't think I could beg of any one, but I *know* I could not beg of the old playmate who used to be so kind to me when he was

a big boy and I was a tiny mite. And it *would* be begging, for we could never pay him back."

The mild reproof struck home. "I—I shouldn't have liked it myself, when it came to the pinch; but—but God help us, dear," Beauchamp faltered, covering his sightless eyes with his thin hand.

Nance walked to the cobwebbed window and stood racking her brain for some way of assuaging her father's grief. Had she been alone in the world she would have gone boldly forth in search of some employment for herself, but she had this poor helpless failure on her hands, and she regretted the breakdown of their wretched little business as much for the moral effect it would have on him as for the stoppage of the pittance earned. It had pleased Mr. Beauchamp to imagine himself the breadwinner, and she had rejoiced that he had been able to retain this feeling, even by following such a queer calling.

But this thing that he had proposed was impossible. She remembered with a renewed blush that it had not been only as "tiny mite" and "big boy" that she and Sir Charles Roylance had known each other. When the crash came she was eighteen and he was three-and-twenty, and the enforced separation had cut short an association that had promised to blossom into something sweeter than friendship. Her father had never been told of those "chance" meetings in the boundary lane between the Abbey and Grange estates, but she had kept them locked in her breast as a precious memory during the dark days of exile.

Nance was recalled from her sad reverie by a clumsy step on the stairs, and a moment later a red-faced, burly, youngish man burst into the room. Without removing a very shiny hat, which he wore on the back of his head, he stared hard at Nance, but addressed himself to Beauchamp.

"Well, old chap! You're Parker, I suppose?" he began rudely. "Well, I'm Hooligan—Lord Hooligan—and I've a whim to start in this line myself. Want a partner?"

Nance could hardly believe her ears. Had this rough-tongued, blear-eyed wretch, of whom she had read strange stories, and whose impertinence it was her first impulse to resent, dropped from the skies to relieve them of their difficulties?

Chesney Beauchamp rose, and with grave dignity referred to his affliction, begging his visitor to be seated—a superfluous courtesy, since Hooligan had flung himself a-straddle of one of the Windsor chairs.

"I would be happy to consider such a proposition, but it is my duty to warn you that this is not a very flourishing concern," added the old gentleman.

"You've got a sweet thing in lady clerks, anyhow," said Hooligan, with an ugly leer at Nance. "However, that's neither here nor there. This is business—real business, Parker. Here's ten tenners—one hundred in notes—and you can have 'em to play with if—if you'll give me a share of the plunder. And I can put you on to a good thing to start the partnership."

"Isn't it rather unusual for one in your lordship's position to wish to embark in such a business?" Beauchamp demurred stiffly. He was annoyed by the light reference to Nance; but she, who read him like a book, was determined not to let her natural repugnance to this coarse creature stand in the way of his needs.

"I should be disposed to accept Lord Hooligan's offer, father," she interposed quietly.

"Oh, the fair charmer's your daughter, is she, Parker?" Hooligan went on. "And evidently knows a thing or two. Well, is it agreed? Come,

take the notes, old boy, and be happy. You'll never regret it."

So Chesney Beauchamp yielded and took the notes thrust into his hand. "I shall expect to boss the show a bit," said Hooligan, rising. "And between ourselves, it is because I've got hold of a good thing that I've gone into this. There will be a trial on Epsom Downs to-morrow that will open some people's eyes. I can see my way to turning the 'Lightning Finals' into a gold-mine by putting the public on to a horse that I'm too hard up to back myself."

"You have certainly acquired a right to have a voice in our affairs," Beauchamp assented.

"Then send out Sir Charles Roylance's Starlight for the New Century Handicap, and use that cash to rake in fresh subscribers," was the reply. "Now I'm off. See you again soon. So long!"

The clumsy footsteps clattered down the stairs, leaving father and daughter speechless for a while under the mixed sensations of humiliation and relief.

"What an insufferable cad!" said Mr. Beauchamp presently.

Nance went and kissed him passionately. "Never mind, dear," she murmured. "Perhaps he's an angel—very much disguised. At any rate, his coming was providential. He has saved the situation."

But for all that she had made up her mind to witness the trial of Starlight on the morrow and judge for herself whether some hidden motive, possibly adverse to Sir Charles Roylance, was not at the bottom of Hooligan's action.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FACE IN THE GORSE

WHEN the evening train by which Nance went down to Epsom drew into the station she hurriedly rose and quitted the compartment. Her haste was due to a desire to avoid a wild-looking young woman who had been her sole fellow-traveller from London, and whose strange behaviour had filled her with alarm. Several times this person had seemed on the point of addressing her, only to relapse into curious mutterings interspersed with laughter.

Carrying her hand-bag, Nance left the station, and in the gathering dusk walked rapidly in the direction of the cottage where she meant to seek lodging for the night. As luck would have it, one of the housemaids at the Grange had married a gardener in the old Surrey town, and this former servant, Nance was assured, would give her shelter without asking questions about her early rising on the morrow.

She had not gone far, however, when running footsteps sounded behind her, and her late fellow-passenger overtook her.

"Don't be afraid, I'm not mad—only in trouble," the woman panted. "I liked your face, my dear, in the train, and I wanted to say what I say now: Never believe in a man—especially if he's got a

handle to his name. They're all tarred with the same brush, but that sort is worse than the rest—liars and deceivers every one. Maybe you'll thank me for the warning some day. Good-night, and sleep softer than I shall."

She flitted away before Nance could utter the sympathy that rose to her lips, and the girl walked on, saddened by the episode—so many people seemed unhappy, she thought. But the warm welcome accorded to her at the cottage on the Ewell Road soon drove it from her mind, and she retired to rest in a little chamber under the thatch with all her faculties concentrated on the business that had brought her.

The other inmates were all sleeping when Nance stole out in the first flush of dawn and made her way to the Downs. She was well acquainted with the glorious stretch of upland, having attended race meetings there with her father in happier days—not, as she reflected with a pang, as a sort of tout for "Parker's Lightning Finals," but as a spectator of the struggle for the "Blue Riband" from the roof of a coach.

But the fresh morning air braced her spirits, and by the time the sun rose as a golden ball over Tattenham Corner she was inclined to be amused by her adventure. There were as yet no signs of life about, except a vehicle that looked like a hansom over by the distant grand stand; and Nance congratulated herself, as she sought cover in a patch of gorse, that her private view of Starlight's performance would remain her own secret.

There they came at last, the string of a dozen daintily stepping thoroughbreds from the yard gates of the grey buildings that she knew were the stables of Starlight's trainer, Tom Barron. They were hooded and sheeted, all but three, which she guessed

were to take part in the trial spin, and the race-horses were accompanied by two men, mounted on cobs, in addition to the stable lads. Nance had got Starlight's description from the well-thumbed *Ruff* in the office, and she was trying to pick out the colt when a sound close at hand, half gasp and half groan, caused her to turn suddenly.

There, not ten paces off, peering at her with wide-open, horror-struck eyes, was the female who had accosted her the night before. The woman was in a kneeling position, and seemed to have propped her chin on the fork of a bush in the gorse-patch. There was blood, caused by the gorse prickles, on the weird countenance, which was distorted in a hideous grimace. The sight was so horrible that Nance unconsciously rose to her feet and sped into the open, her one idea to flee from that uncanny neighbour, of whose madness she was now assured.

A shout of angry surprise from the trainer's men greeted the girl's unexpected appearance. A faint cry of "There's a tout spying on us" reached her ears, and instantly she saw a horseman detach himself from the mounted group and canter towards her. Nearer and nearer he came, and then, as she recognized the frank, dare-devil eyes and healthy sun-browned face, she prayed that the ground might open and swallow her.

The horseman was Starlight's owner—her own old playmate, Sir Charles Roylance.

"I say, what are you prowling round my horses for?" he began sternly, then pulled up short and stared hard at the shrinking figure. "Miss Beauchamp! Nance!" he exclaimed, "forgive my roughness, but I——"

"Naturally didn't know I was in Epsom," Nance took him up. "I thought the Downs were free to any one; at any rate, I'm not the only one——"

"If you mention that woman, he shall be told that you're neither more nor less than a tipster—*Miss Parker's Finals*," came a man's hoarse whisper from the bushes behind her.

At the sound of that mysterious warning Nance involuntarily turned, but from where she stood at the edge of the gorse there was no one visible behind her. The menace, however, that had reached her ears was a very real one, and she intuitively obeyed it, feeling that she would die rather than that Sir Charles Roylance should be informed of her present means of gaining a livelihood. After all, she told herself, the presence of other spectators at the trial was no affair of hers.

In the agitation of the moment she did not stop to speculate on the identity of the unseen whisperer, but adroitly contrived to avoid the perilous subject without letting Sir Charles suspect the reason why she had interrupted her sentence.

"I was going to say," she went on, "that I am not the only one who enjoys an early stroll before the dew is off the grass."

"My dear Miss Beauchamp—or may it still be Nance?—why take my boorish behaviour so seriously?" replied the young baronet in evident distress. "Of course you have every right to go just wherever you like, and I can assure you that I am too delighted at this fortunate meeting to be able to apologize prettily. Why, it must be three years since—since the dear old days."

"Three years and two months. It was in March, you know, that we left the Grange," Nance faltered, wondering if he would remember.

Yes, his next words gave her that glad assurance. "Of course it was. As if I could ever forget that wild evening when we said good-bye, you and I, in the pouring rain, by the park wall," he answered.

"That day and those that followed were the most wretched of my life. No, Nance, I have not forgotten, any more than I have forgotten your cruelty in refusing to write to me or to give me your address. How is Mr. Beauchamp? The Grange hardly seems the same without the Squire."

Having expressed his sorrow on hearing of his old friend's blindness, Sir Charles drew her attention to the string of race-horses. Those in their cloths were already taking walking exercise, but the three stripped for trial were clustered at the one mile starting-post, whence Tom Barron was making impatient signals to his employer.

"I am trying one of my nags this morning—Starlight, a colt that may have a chance for the New Century at Sandown next month. It will be rather a pretty sight, and you'll get a better view over by the stands," said Sir Charles. "I am afraid I mustn't exasperate Barron by keeping them waiting at the post any longer; but I'll canter across to the finish and get your opinion. You used to be a good judge."

Only too glad to get away from the vicinity of those horrible gorse bushes, which must still contain that white, haunting woman's face and the hidden threatener, Nance nodded and made her way to the stands, while Sir Charles pricked his cob to join the trainer at the post. In the mingled joy and sadness of the meeting the girl had almost forgotten the purpose of her expedition, but now, as she trod the springy turf alone, the degradation of her position dawned upon her in all its force.

She was really a spy, for filthy lucre, on the man who, the last five minutes had shown her, was her undeclared lover—whom her own heart told her she had loved almost from babyhood!

How doubly "filthy" seemed the hundred

pounds handed to her father by Lord Hooligan now!

The vague impulse which had prompted her to come and witness the trial took more definite shape in her mind. Then and there she determined that, if she could discover any menace to Sir Charles Roylance's interests on the part of her father's new partner, she would devote all her energies, all her woman's wit, to defeating the project. But she would have to do it without letting Charley—yes, she thought of him as "Charley" still—know of her occupation. The shame would be more than she could bear were he to learn that Nance Beauchamp of Beauchamp Grange was the mainstay of "Parker's Lightning Finals."

By the grand stand the hansom which she had observed earlier was waiting in charge of a smart groom who eyed her keenly, but beyond noting that the cab was a private one—possibly belonging to Sir Charles—she paid very little attention to it. She went and took her stand by the winning-post where one of the stablemen had already stationed himself to act as judge. The man, having seen her in friendly converse with the owner, touched his cap civilly, but made no remark till he laconically announced—

"Here they come!"

Round the famous "corner" swept the three horses, and so intent was Nance on watching the struggle that she paid no heed to Sir Charles and the trainer when they arrived by the short cut from the start. Once in the straight the great raking chestnut which Nance identified as Starlight took the lead, but, obviously tiring at "the distance," was beaten on the post by a short head. To the uninitiated the result might have been disappointing, but Sir Charles and the trainer appeared overjoyed.

"My word; but we've got a clinker," said the latter, as he went to the colt's head and rinsed its mouth from a soda-water bottle.

"Good enough to run for a kingdom, eh, Barron?" Sir Charles laughed with a pride which Nance could not understand.

But the mystery was explained to her by Sir Charles himself, who dismounted from his hack and walked at her side. The trial horses, both notable winners of many big races, had been lightly weighted at 5st. 7lb., whereas Starlight had carried the crushing impost of 10st. 10lb. and had nearly won. In the race itself the colt was weighted at 6st., and had nothing better against him than the two horses with which he had just run. It certainly looked as if the New Century Handicap was at his mercy.

"Heaven knows I want to win it, too, Nance," the baronet went on. "Secrets between such old friends as we have been would be out of place, and I frankly tell you that Starlight has dropped from the skies to be my salvation. If he doesn't win, or if I cannot back him at a long price, the Abbey will have to go. You know I inherited a pile of mortgages, as well as a none too successful stud of racehorses, and both these heritages have weighed on me like a millstone. If I can right matters by one good win and pay off the debts, I've decided to give up racing altogether."

"You know you have my best wishes," responded Nance. "But wasn't it rather cruel to make your horse carry such an enormous weight in the trial?"

"Perhaps so, but it was absolutely necessary," Sir Charles replied. "If we had tried Starlight at even weights, as it turns out, he would have romped home about forty lengths in front of the others, and some miserable spy would have seen it and sold the

information. Then there would have been a rush on the horse, and I should have had my market forestalled."

At that moment Nance could have screamed aloud in agony of self-reproach. Little did the eager young man pacing at her side and giving her all his confidence think that she was one of the "wretched spies" whom he so indignantly condemned. Little did he think that she and her father had tried to save themselves from ultimate disaster by an implied engagement to "sell the information" which would entail his ruin.

Choking back her emotion, she thanked Providence that the instinct which had brought her to Epsom had given her a key to the situation. At least that sordid little concern "Parker's Lightning Finals" should have no part in making public the knowledge she had obtained. She had the most implicit trust in her father's honour, much more than in his wisdom, and she was assured that he would return the partnership money to Lord Hooligan, if the latter insisted on their recommending Sir Charles' colt to their subscribers.

But what of those lurkers in the gorse—the mad woman of inarticulate utterance and staring eyes, and the masculine whisperer of threats who knew about her business? She comforted herself that though they also must have witnessed the trial, it must have been utterly misleading to them, as they would not know what the horses carried. They would regard Starlight as an ignominious failure.

At any rate, in face of that threat of exposure, she dared not tell Sir Charles that the bushes on the hill held other spectators, though she essayed to rouse his suspicions indirectly.

"You were wise to thwart the spies," she forced

herself to reply calmly. "Have you noticed that cab by the grand stand? Perhaps it belongs to some one who is spying on you."

But Sir Charles smiled and shook his head. "Horse-watchers don't drive about in private hansoms," he said. "That probably belongs to some owner who's gone to one of the other training stables. And now, tell me of yourself, Nance. Are you living in this sleepy old town? Surely you needn't hide yourself any longer from one who will be a companion in misfortune if that good horse doesn't win his race."

"I am only here on—on a visit, and I am going back to London by an early train," faltered Nance. And then, reflecting that the Bremners, the people with whom she and her father lodged, knew nothing of the establishment in Red Lion Court, she added: "We live at Beaker Street, Islington, but please don't come there till I have found out if father would like it. We are both very poor and very proud, you see."

"That's a step on the right road, anyhow," said Sir Charles, making a note of the address. "And if Mr. Beauchamp doesn't feel up to seeing me there's another way out of the difficulty. I have rented a furnished cottage at Barfield-on-Thames, near Chertsey, so as to be within hail of my stud, and there's an aunt of mine, Lady Alice Mashiter, living in the village. She's a trifle eccentric, but not half a bad sort, and I will get her to ask you down,"

"You forget my father's blindness; it is seldom that I can leave him," said Nance, with a weary memory of her daily task of steering the old gentleman on his pilgrimages to and from the dingy office. And yet the yearning for female sympathy which had oppressed her prompted her not to

wholly refuse. "Perhaps some Sunday," she added shyly.

"That's a promise, mind," cried Sir Charles eagerly.

So presently they parted hopefully in the bright May morning, Sir Charles to accompany the horses back to the stables, and Nance to snatch a hasty breakfast before returning to London.

At the edge of the Downs she turned and looked back. The string of thoroughbreds was wending its way homeward, and the gorse-patch on the hill lay bathed in the golden sunlight, yielding no hint of human occupation.

And by the grand stand the smart private hansom was still waiting.

## CHAPTER IV

### A MISSING SISTER

THE *Union Jack* tavern, in "Merrie Islington," is a noted house of call for the dwellers in the many residential thoroughfares debouching from the surrounding streets. Its large saloon bar is nightly crowded by regular customers—mostly City clerks inhabiting the adjacent rows of thirty-pound houses, with a sprinkling of the neighbouring shopkeepers.

There is a distinctly sporting flavour about the *Union Jack*, originally due, no doubt, to the well-known proclivities of the popular landlord, but which has long since infected the frequenters of both the public and the private bars. The tavern, well managed and orderly enough, has thriven on its acquired tone, and habitually to "run down to the *Jack* for an hour or two of an evening" is equivalent to a confession that you take a more or less active interest in horseracing and kindred matters.

It has even been rumoured that if a customer standing at the bar is suddenly smitten with a desire to "back his fancy" it will not be necessary for him to quit the premises in order to do so. And rumour has gone further and singled out a certain frequenter named Billy Tidmarsh as the accommodating cause of this convenience.

Be this as it may, Mr. Tidmarsh was always to be found during the earlier hours of the day in the public bar used largely by the employés at a neighbouring factory; while in the evening, when the black-coated denizens of the district had trooped back from the City, he transformed his bulky person and his patronage to the cosy, gilt-mirrored saloon bar, where he always occupied a stool at the extreme end of the counter.

On the evening of the day of Starlight's trial Mr. Tidmarsh was in his usual place, but it was observed that he was not in his usual spirits. He was a big man, with everything about him on a generous scale. The pattern of his large-check suit suggested a collection of four-acre meadows; a steam launch might have been moored with his heavy watch-chain; his chin was double, and his huge cheeks were mostly rippling in a placid smile. It was the absence of this smile to-night that caused one of the young ladies behind the bar to remark to her admirer of the moment that "Billy seemed a bit off colour."

As a general rule Mr. Tidmarsh was of a genial mood—hail-fellow-well-met with all and sundry who approached him. To-night he sat and sipped his special Scotch with a dejected air that was enhanced by the curt answers he gave to all who attempted to engage him in conversation. He made some slight effort to be affable to one or two customers who furtively passed him mysterious slips of paper, but the result as a whole was a dismal failure. The good-looking barmaid had hit the mark in describing Tidmarsh as "off colour."

About nine o'clock a youngish man, of sandy hair and complexion, clad in shabby dark garments and wearing a dilapidated tall hat, entered the saloon, and, nodding to numerous acquaintances,

made his way to the corner where Tidmarsh was perched on a stool with his back to the wall.

"Here's a dollar each way for Wood Pigeon at Hurst Park to-morrow," said the new-comer, placing something in the other's hand. "But what's wrong, Billy?" he added, scanning the vast expanse of gloom on Mr. Tidmarsh's countenance. "You seem to have got the hump."

"God it fair, Bremner," was the reply. "Did ever I tell you I had a sister?"

"Not that I remember."

"Well, I did have one—a regular fine girl of a sister," replied Tidmarsh with a mixture of sadness and pride. "Name your drink, and listen while I tell you about her."

Interested glances were shot at the pair, as Bremner, being supplied with a glass of bitter, seated himself on the next stool and gave the big man all his attention. The friendship between the betting man and the impecunious though speculatively inclined lawyer's clerk had always puzzled the customers of the *Union Jack*, although really it was capable of simple explanation. Frank Bremner's employers, Nathan and Nathan, the lawyers, had once been instrumental in extricating Mr. Tidmarsh from a tight corner in respect of a little matter of street betting, and the grateful client had included the clerk in his gratitude to the notable firm of solicitors.

The facts that they were near neighbours, and that Bremner was addicted to betting, had caused them to become intimates in a closer sense than the jolly good fellowship which prevailed between Tidmarsh and his other supporters.

"Did you ever hear tell of Bessie Beckford—her as was at the halls a while back?" inquired the bookmaker, with whom grammar was not a strong point.

"Of course I did. She got married and left the stage about a year ago," said Bremner, opening his eyes rather wide.

"Well, she was my sister," responded Tidmarsh. "But the marriage was a bogus one, and the poor thing came to utter grief. The chap that deceived her deserted her in a couple of months. She would never tell me who he was, but if I could find out I would tear the black heart out of him."

"I should think so; but why didn't she go back to the halls?" asked Bremner sympathetically.

"Her voice went wrong—with crying so much, the doctor said—and then a child came. That died, but she was never any good again, poor lass. I've been allowing her fifteen shillings a week since the fellow bolted, which was all I could afford, seeing what an expensive bit of goods my missus is. A bookie doesn't always roll in wealth, for all people say. It was all I could afford, and now it's all over."

And Mr. Tidmarsh went on to explain the cause of his trouble. He had been in the habit of visiting his sister at her lodging in Lambeth to pay her the weekly dole. On calling that morning he had been informed by her landlady that she had seemed very strange all the previous day, and that she had not been home all night—a thing that had never happened before. He had arranged for the landlady to wire him at the *Union Jack* in the event of her return, but no telegram had come. He was afraid that she had committed suicide, and he blamed himself for not having given her a larger allowance.

"Though even if I could have made it thirty bob it wouldn't have made much difference to one who had earned her twenty pounds a week at the halls," he added dolefully.

"You must cheer up, old man; it's odds she'll

turn up all right. Perhaps she's met with an accident and got taken to hospital," Bremner tried to comfort him.

"No, something tells me Bessie's dead," insisted Tidmarsh. "And see here, Frank, I'm not a regular Sherlock Holmes—that's more in your line—but there's another way of looking at it," he added, bending nearer. "It's on the cards she may have been threatening the scoundrel that wronged her, and that he's murdered her."

"Possible, but not likely."

"If there has been foul play I'll never rest till I've hanged him or swung for him," continued Tidmarsh excitedly. "And you can lend a hand, Frank. In an office like Nathan's you hear of things that don't come to my notice—reports of inquests and such. If you come across the account of a woman, wearing a black cloth jacket and a soiled red skirt, being found in the river or anywhere, you let me know, will you?"

The lawyer's clerk gave the required promise, and soon after bade his friend good-night. But Tidmarsh called him back for a moment, and said—

"I saw your lodgers, the old blind gentleman and his daughter, in Fleet Street the other day. They were just turning into Red Lion Court."

"Did you now!" exclaimed Bremner thoughtfully. "I've often wondered where they got to all day. They're nice people, but they're precious close about themselves, except that they have come down in the world. Looks as if the old boy was something in the literary line, doesn't it?"

"That must be it, I reckon," the bookmaker assented. "The gal looks every inch a lady, so he can't be the chap that sends out losers under the soobrikat of 'Parker's Lightning Finals.'"

Frank Bremner, the clever, honest, but thriftless

solicitor's clerk, made his way along the dull uniformity of Beaker Street to the home that would have been entirely happy but for his mania for betting. He knew nothing about horses, and had only been on a racecourse four times in his life, yet he put half a crown or sometimes five shillings on some carefully-thought-out "selection" every day. The result was that he and his family were compelled to live in the basement, while the first floor was let to lodgers upon whom his wife had to wait.

The piano, a wedding gift from his colleagues at the office, had recently vanished to pay the last quarter's rent, and there was a summons in the house for the water rate.

In spite of these misfortunes and a strong suspicion that he had been frittering away some much-needed money at "that wretched *Jack*," Mary Bremner greeted her husband with an affectionate smile as he entered the sitting-room where she sat patching a child's frock. A buxom, well-favoured woman of thirty, worthy of better things than to be a household drudge, she had never permitted sordid cares to set the seal of discontent on her comely face, though she seldom spent an hour free from anxiety lest Frank's folly should cast their little ship on the rocks of ruin.

"I'm glad you've come in," she said. "Mr. Beauchamp is ill. As I told you at supper, I noticed something queer about them when they came in at six o'clock. She was just as careful of her father as usual, but they were quite quiet, not saying a word to each other, and it was the same when I took up their tea. About ten minutes after you had gone out Miss Nance came down in a rare way, and I had to fetch Dr. Smallwood. The old gentleman has had a slight stroke, it seems."

"I'm sorry for that. I wonder if it had anything to do with her being away from home last night," said Bremner. "If so, it's funny, because I've come across another party in the last hour that's been upset by a lady staying out all night."

But Mrs. Bremner ridiculed the idea. Mr. Beauchamp had told her at breakfast-time that his daughter had gone with his consent a little way into the country to visit an old servant. And when Miss Nance had returned in the morning they had gone out together as usual, the best of friends.

## CHAPTER V

### BY BRUTE FORCE

FOR all that, Nance Beauchamp's expedition to Epsom was the indirect cause of the seizure which had overtaken her father.

On her return to London she had gone straight to Islington to take the old man to his daily avocation in Red Lion Court, but, in accordance with their practice never to discuss the affairs of "Parker's Lightning Finals" at their lodgings, she had waited till they reached the office before apprising him of the result of her journey.

Then had come disillusion, swift and confounding. Mr. Beauchamp took a view of what honour required of him exactly opposite to the one she had expected. He insisted, on hearing of Starlight's excellent prospects, that his duty was to his subscribers and his new partner rather than to Sir Charles Roylance.

Vainly Nance pleaded for a return of the money to Lord Hooligan and for the suppression of the information she had obtained. Mr. Beauchamp would have none of it. He pointed out that a considerable sum having already been spent on advertising it was impossible to refund the money, even were he so disposed, and he bade her write

letters to the subscribers predicting the victory of Sir Charles' colt.

This Nance had flatly refused to do. Apart from the sentiments she cherished for the once merry boy and now harassed man who had played with her in childhood, she felt that it would be the height of dishonour to publish, to his detriment, secrets which he had poured into her ear in all ignorance of her occupation.

So for the first time a cloud had arisen between the blind man and his child, and all that day the deadlock had prevailed, till after the return in the evening Mr. Beauchamp's agitation had culminated in a slight stroke of paralysis.

In the morning he was much better, and was only prevented by the representations of the doctor from going to the office. Nothing would pacify him, however, but that Nance should go, and as the doctor said that to oppose him might be dangerous and that he might be safely left to the kindly care of Mrs. Bremner, she consented.

"And, my child, when you come home I hope to hear that you have carried out my wishes," he said, as she kissed him good-bye.

Murmuring a non-committal answer, Nance handed the invalid over to Mary Bremner, who entered most opportunely, and went out into the glum drabness of Beaker Street, dazed by the complex horror of her position.

If she did her father's bidding she would ruin her lover; if she failed to do it her refusal might bring on another and more fatal attack, which would leave her fatherless.

Whichever course she took she was destined, it seemed, to bring disaster on one or other of the only two on earth whom she loved.

The dingy, creaking stairs in Red Lion Court had

never been so hateful to the country-bred girl as when she unlocked the door and entered the stuffy office that morning. She had to push against quite a pile of letters that had been dropped through the slit, and she guessed with a pang of shame that these were the first fruits of the advertisements sent for insertion immediately after the replenishment of their coffers by Lord Hooligan.

Gathering the letters from the floor and seating herself at the table, she quickly proved the truth of her surmise. Every envelope contained a postal order and a request to be enlightened as to the "good thing" which "Mr. Parker" had to impart to his subscribers. "Mr. Parker's" representative leaned her pretty head on her hands and nearly broke down under this addition of her dilemma.

For the advertisements had brought in four hundred and twenty-seven new subscribers. Hitherto they had subsisted on an average of thirty, so that the morning's postal delivery meant an enormous increase in the number of persons entitled, according to her father's view, to the secret of Starlight's performance.

Mechanically she entered the names and addresses of the applicants for fortune in the book kept for the purpose, and placed the postal orders in the table-drawer. Then, suddenly, inspiration came to her. She would go to Charles Roylance and humble herself—confess everything, and beg him to provide the means for paying out their objectionable partner. Then with perfect honesty the money could be returned to the subscribers. She would have to risk the effect on her father, but she hoped and believed that, his obligations to Hooligan and the subscribers being at an end, he would endorse what she had done.

She would never be able to look "Charley" in

the face again, but it would be better than retaining his regard by false pretences at the expense of his ruin.

Straightway she made preparations for departing on her pilgrimage of self-sacrifice, and so absorbed was she that a lumbering footfall on the stairs escaped her notice. No warning of what was to come fell on her ears till the door flew open and Hooligan swaggered in.

He stopped inside the doorway, stared round, and broke into a hoarse guffaw. "Oh, you naughty little slyboots," he said. "So you've given the old 'un a day off. Well, have you tipped Starlight to the chaps on your, or I should say *our*, list?"

Taken altogether by surprise, Nance nevertheless mustered sufficient presence of mind to treat the titled rough with open defiance. All the woman in her rose in loathing against him. Quick instinct told her that a semblance of friendliness would be unsafe, in that lonely top floor, towards a man whose character was written plain in his face.

"I am just about to lock up the office," she said. "I cannot discuss business in my father's absence. He is unwell, and you had better call again in a day or two, when he will probably be here."

Hooligan glared at her with the ferocity of an angry tiger. "That's your game, is it," he cried. "Collared my coin and sold me. But you've been too clever, Miss Whatever-you-may-call-yourself," he added, pouncing at the table and seizing the volume labelled "Address book." "There's a jobbing printer a few doors away, I see. I'll have some circulars struck off and post 'em myself within the hour."

"Before you have done that I shall have fetched a constable and given you in charge for stealing my property," cried Nance hotly, darting to the door

to put her threat into execution. But Hooligan was too quick for her. Catching her on the threshold, he twined his arm round her slender waist and slowly but surely dragged her back, fighting every inch of the way, to the dark cupboard in the corner of the room.

Opening the cupboard door with one hand, he held her for one horrible minute pressed so close that the brandy-reek of his breath turned her faint and sick.

"You were going to lock up the office, were you, you pretty little cat, and now I'm going to lock you up," he sneered in her face. "There, in with you, and cool your ardour while I run the show for a bit. I ain't much of a scribe, but I'll get out something spicy to make the public rush to back Roylance's nag."

With which he flung her roughly against the cupboard wall, slammed the door, and turned the key in the lock.

Panting and indignant at the outrage, Nance mastered a strong tendency to swoon, and stood upright in the narrow confines of her prison. To scream for help she knew would be futile. The dull roar of Fleet Street would have drowned her cries had there been any one to hear. But there was no one within earshot of the most piercing cry. "Parker's Lightning Finals" were the sole tenants of the attic floor of the old tenement, which had long since been deserted by all who could afford to pay for modern offices. There was a crack in the cupboard door through which she saw Lord Hooligan seat himself at the table and draft the circular which was to spoil her lover's chance of retrieving his fortunes. Any direct appeal to the man she knew would be in vain, and she abstained from the humiliation of making one. After a few minutes'

scribbling he laid aside the pen, and, taking his manuscript, left the office, returning almost immediately. Nance knew that a fulsome prophecy of Starlight's victory was in the printer's hands.

On re-entering the office Hooligan seemed in two minds whether or not to inspect his captive. Peering through the crack she trembled as the coarse, flushed face approached the cupboard; but to her relief he turned back to the table and began to address envelopes, copying from the book which he had seized.

He had been so engaged for half an hour when Nance heard a tap at the office door, and the sound made her heart beat wildly. Oh, how she prayed Heaven that some one might be at hand to whom she could appeal for release and protection.

## CHAPTER VI

### A QUITE UNEXPECTED VISITOR

"COME in!" shouted Hooligan boldly, somewhat to Nance's surprise. She had feared that he would hesitate to admit a stranger, who might come to her rescue and so frustrate his plans, and she little thought that his readiness to do so would furnish Detective-Inspector Croal, of New Scotland Yard, with the germ of a clue in one of that shrewd officer's most celebrated cases.

He who entered, or, rather, sidled into, the office was a portly, middle-aged person, clad in clerical attire of the smoothest and linen of the whitest, the whole being surmounted by a round, clean-shaven face, glowing with the pink of health and comfortable living. The visitor closed the door very quietly, listened at it for a quarter of a minute, and then tip-toed to the front of the table where Hooligan sat.

"Good morning," he purred. "Good morning, my very dear sir. My name is Quintree—Reverend Peter Quintree, Rector of Barfield-on-Thames. What a—er—truly noble animal is the horse!"

Nance's spirits sank on hearing the visitor's name and address, for his cure of souls was in the very

parish where Sir Charles was living, and to which she had hoped to go down in her own proper name, on a visit to Lady Alice Mashiter. It is true that that hope had been reduced by her recent resolution to inform Sir Charles of the tipping business, but if Hooligan succeeded in sending out the circulars her confession would be useless, and she hesitated to summon to her assistance a stranger, who would then be in a position to expose the miserable way of life to which her father's folly had consigned her.

And what a peculiar stranger, too! The crack in the door showed that even Hooligan's scowl had expanded into a rude grin at the extraordinary opening remark of the nervous visitor.

"Right you are!" his lordship assented cordially; "nothing like the gee-gees if you're good at finding winners. Do I understand that you're backing 'em?"

The visitor coughed uneasily. "I will endeavour to explain," he went on. "I formed the habit of having an occasional wager when I was at Oxford, and I have—er—indulged in it at—er—considerable intervals, and with indifferent success, ever since. My—er—calling precludes attendance on the racecourse, so I have had recourse to postal communication with an—er—turf commissioner—Mr. Valentine Crooker."

"I see. Just a little flutter on the strict Q.T.," said Hooligan. "Excellent chap, Val Crooker."

"I have found him also—er—a very expensive one," his visitor proceeded. "In fact it is with a view to recouping some of my losses in that quarter that I have ventured on the present call. I—er—have seen an advertisement that you have some very special information about the New Century Handicap to be run at Sandown next month—that

is if I have the pleasure of addressing Mr.—er—Parker ? "

" I'm Parker's partner, and can do what you wish," replied Hooligan, evidently with a malignant relish of the situation. " The fee is a dollar for our special advice letter or two guineas for final wires."

Mr. Quintree put down five shillings with a sigh. " I should like to have had the telegrams, but—er—the sad publicity of a village post-office, and my—er—my calling, you understand," he bleated. " And as to the letters, there will be nothing printed, nothing — er — compromising, on the envelopes, I trust ? Some of my parishioners are on the Anti-Gambling League, and I should be sorry to—er—offend them."

" Quite so—might affect the offertories," jerked out Hooligan with a good-humoured brutality that made the applicant wince. " You can leave all that to me," he added. " We'll keep it nice and dark, and you'll be safe to pitch it to 'em strong from the pulpit about the vice of horse-racing."

" And the—er—tip ? " said Quintree anxiously.

" The circulars will be ready in half an hour, if you care to wait ; but I can give you our special certainty now," said Hooligan, with a malicious glance towards the cupboard. " It's Starlight—Sir Charles Roylance's chestnut three-year-old. The colt ran a very good trial yesterday against some real stayers, and you can put your coat on him, or your cassock if you like. Only do it quick. He'll be at even money in less than a week."

In her enforced hiding-place Nance started at the reference to the trial. It carried her back to the gorse-patch on Epsom Downs, and she saw again in all its ghastly pallor the face of the crouching woman, and heard again the whisper of the unseen

man who had threatened her with exposure to Sir Charles. Had Lord Hooligan been present at the trial? Was that menacing whisper his, and his the private hansom that had been waiting by the grand stand?

These questions she could not answer, and for the moment they seemed immaterial in comparison with her own pressing need. She had seen and heard quite enough of the visitor to doubt his fitness to champion a maiden in distress, and his next words confirmed that view.

"I do not think I will wait for the circular, if you will kindly send it on to me to the Rectory by post. I am almost due at a missionary meeting, which I have to address at the West End," he said unctuously, adding with a professional sigh: "I could have wished that your prophetic genius could have indicated the horse of some other owner than Sir Charles Roylance, who is a temporary parishioner of mine. He seldom sets foot in church. though, after all, my dear sir, perhaps he's an instrument—an instrument for good, who knows?"

"He'll be the instrument of your winning a hatful of money if you're sharp about it," said Hooligan, nodding a careless farewell as the new client shuffled out.

"Faugh! how I hate a hypocrite. I am glad I did not crave assistance from such a creature as that," Nance told herself indignantly.

Presently the noble tipster went out to the jobbing printer's, and came back with the circulars, which he proceeded to enclose in the addressed envelopes. Then, having done up the whole in a paper parcel and placed it under his arm, he came and kicked at the cupboard door.

"I'm going to post this little lot," he called through the panel. "I shall turn up again by the

time you're getting hungry, and then perhaps you'll be glad to see me."

Nance vouchsafed no reply, and Hooligan went down into the court, having first securely locked the outer door of the office and put the key in his pocket. Making his way to the post-office in Fleet Street he got the bundle of circulars stamped, dropped them into the letter-box, and walked across the road to Anderton's, at the door of which Tannadyce's smart private hansom was standing. He went straight through into the smoking-room, where he found the moneylender himself discussing a small bottle of champagne.

"You've been a dickens of a time," said Tannadyce, making room for his henchman on the lounge.

"Because I've had the dickens' own job," replied Hooligan. "But I've pulled it off all right." And he recounted with much coarse gusto what he had done at the office of "Parker's Lightning Finals," laying special stress on his acumen in guessing that his instructions to tip Sir Charles Roylance's horse would have been evaded.

"There wasn't so much in that, considering that you saw the girl walking about amicably with Roylance at the trial," Tannadyce remarked drily. "Naturally the presumption was that they were old acquaintances—on what footing does not quite appear. Had you any opportunity for forming an opinion as to that?"

There was a perceptible pause before Hooligan replied, due, possibly, to his at that moment dropping the cigar which he had been about to light. Then, when he had picked it up, it would have been a pity, of course, to waste the flaming match which he held in his fingers, and it was not till he had leisurely drawn the Havannah into a steady glow that he found his tongue.

"No; I never got near enough to hear their talk," he said. "They met over on the hill first, and were afterwards together down at the finish. I wasn't on the hill at all. She's probably some old sweetheart of his—barmaid, or something like that, perhaps, before she took to this work in the tipping line."

"Now why in the world is his lordship lying to me about such an apparent trifle?" Tannadyce asked himself after a sidelong glance. But he kept his own counsel, and said quietly: "What do you propose to do with the minx?"

"Keep her boxed up till after the ground-floor people have left for the day—then go back and tame her, when there's no one to interfere," replied Hooligan. "And now, if you don't want me," he added, "I'll trot across to the office of the *Blue Blazes* and take the boys out for a drink."

"Go along," Tannadyce assented. "I shall finish this small bottle and get back to the West End."

## CHAPTER VII

### A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

AFTER Lord Hooligan's departure to hob-nob with his friends, Mr. Leopold Tannadyce sat in deep meditation, his sallow face alternately creased into a sly smile and contracted in a frown rather of calculation than anger.

His smile was for the ease with which he had discerned a certain reserve in Hooligan's reference to the meeting which he had already reported to his chief, between the girl from the blind tipster's office and Sir Charles Roylance. His frown was caused by his efforts to account for that reserve.

"There was something queer about Hooly's doings that morning, or why should he be so precise —mendaciously precise probably—about his own movements," the moneylender reflected, pursing out his Hebraic lips in the seclusion of the deserted smoking-room. "Anyhow, I can't have the girl left in that cupboard. My preposterous jackal forgets that any rumpus at 'Parker's Lightning Finals' just now would upset my plans. I will go round and let her out, and try to fathom this little puzzle, for Roylance is not the man, from what I have seen of him, to indulge in light loves such as my noble friend hinted at."

The Napoleon of West End usury had two

weaknesses—the one an overwhelming ambition to become a social magnate, flattered and worshipped for his wealth by the very class he had despoiled, the other an appreciation of feminine beauty. It might be that the girl shut up in Red Lion Court would furnish gratification for both these foibles. If she was a lady whom Sir Charles Roylance treated on terms of equality she might prove a stepping-stone to those inner circles of county society from which the moneylender was now barred as a rank outsider.

"I have already got my grip on Roylance's estates; it would be a curious coincidence if it fell to my lot to relieve him of a lady-love as well," Tannadyce murmured complacently. "I will certainly go and befriend the prisoner for whom Hooligan has such pleasant things in store."

It was characteristic of the man's callousness that he made no allowance for any opposition to his wishes. It was his practice to trample down opposition, and any consideration for the feelings of others never entered his head. On the whole this cold schemer, of the suave and polished manners, was likely to prove a far more dangerous adversary to unplighted lovers than the foul-tongued titled ruffian who had put him on the scent of his quarry. Personal violence to an unprotected woman, such as Hooligan had prided himself in, Tannadyce would never have dreamed of. His methods were much more subtle and deadly.

Blackmail, compromise, insidious slander, bribery and the suborning of perjured evidence—these were weapons to be found in the equipment of the gentleman who started out with the benevolent intention of releasing Nance and putting her under a personal obligation which he might or might not desire to

Having carefully surveyed himself in one of the mirrors, Tannadyce left the smoking-room and went to the hotel entrance, where his private cab was waiting.

"Skinner, I want you to remain here and keep your eye on Red Lion Court," he said to the driver. "It is probable that I shall come out presently with a lady, and there separate from her. If I take out my handkerchief you are to follow her in the cab, and ascertain where she goes—without letting her know it, of course."

These instructions given, he sought a locksmith's shop, and having procured the services of an assistant, repaired to the top floor of the old house in the court. The outer door quickly yielded to the manipulation of the craftsman, and thereupon there arose from the cupboard a feeble cry for help. In less than a minute Nance, half stifled by her close confinement, was thanking her unknown liberator.

"I am only too delighted to be of use," said Tannadyce, assuming his most gentlemanly manner and abstaining from any air of patronage. "I happened to be in the smoking-room of a hotel near by, and I overheard a blackguardly fellow boasting of what he had done, so I secured assistance and came round. By the way, from what I gathered the person had possessed himself of your key. Would it not be well to have a new lock put on, so that he will be unable to gain access?"

Nance agreed cordially, and, the locksmith having departed to fetch a new lock, Tannadyce made as though he, too, would take his leave. But the frightened girl begged him to stay till the workman returned. "That—that brute might come back," she said.

"I will remain most willingly," Tannadyce

replied graciously. "Being a stranger, I did not like to make the offer myself, but it made my heart bleed to think of leaving you unprotected. May I ask if that scoundrel is known to you?"

"He has some business connection with my father, who was prevented by illness from coming here to-day," was all the explanation Nance could give. For very shame she could not bring herself to describe the details of Hooligan's outrageous conduct to this courteous gentleman, little thinking that she was talking to the cause of it.

"Forgive my saying that it was at least ill-advised of your father to allow you to attend here alone on—on the class of business notified on the door," remarked the rescuer with well-feigned warmth. "You are not quite the sort of young lady one would expect to find in a turf adviser's office."

Nance's eyes filled with tears. She was all unstrung by the outrage to which she had been subjected, and by her failure to protect Sir Charles Roylance's interests. The tone of sympathy touched her and drew her confidence—exactly as it was intended to. "We have not always done this; my father knows about horses and nothing else, so it was all we could turn to when we fell upon hard times," she faltered.

"Broken gentlefolk, as I thought," murmured Tannadyce, sotto voce, and added aloud, "What a sad story! Do you know, I didn't like to mention it, but I had a sort of notion that I had seen you before—in the hunting-field in Berkshire. I am a Londoner, but I used to run down for a day now and then."

This was an absolute lie, for Tannadyce had never mounted a horse in his life. It was designed to ascertain if she had formerly resided in the

neighbourhood of Roylance Abbey, and it met with instant success. He had been so kind and had extricated her from such a horrible position that Nance was thrown completely off her guard, thinking only that as he was not one of their neighbours in the old county the small confidence to which he seemed entitled would not matter.

"If you hunted with Garth's hounds you very likely saw me," she admitted. "We used to live in the centre of that country."

Mr. Leopold Tannadyce was a clever man. He had got what he wanted, but he showed no sign that she had practically told him her real name. He had the history of the country gentry at his finger-tips, and he knew all about Squire Beauchamp's ruin and disappearance. He had been specially interested in it, as the Grange property lay next to the Roylance Abbey estates, on which his clutch was about to close. He had no difficulty in identifying in this beautiful occupant of a tipster's dingy office the daughter of the once-respected landowner.

The discovery filled him with unholy joy; for not only was the girl herself lovely beyond his dreams, but a union with Miss Beauchamp, formerly of Beauchamp Grange, would go far to securing his own position in the county when he had ousted Sir Charles from the Abbey. The programme he had half jestingly sketched out for himself should be adhered to in every particular. He would have the baronet's sweetheart as well as his stately home.

But there were many things to be done before his purpose could be consummated. The first was to provide a lever for bending her to his will, and one lay ready to his hand. Letting his eyes wander idly over the table, he affected to see for the first

time the circular which Hooligan had had printed, and on which the name of Sir Charles Roylance, as the owner of Starlight, figured in large type.

"Ah, if you lived in that part of the world it would account for your favourable opinion about Sir Charles Roylance's horse," he said, taking up and glancing at the effusion. "Doubtless my old friend Sir Charles informed you of its merits."

Nance turned deadly pale under the cunningly contrived blow, and Tannadyce perceived that he had not cast his net in vain.

"You—you are acquainted with Sir Charles Roylance?" she stammered, wishing that she had bitten out her tongue before revealing her secret to one who might pass it on to the quarter from which she most desired to preserve it.

"I know him intimately," said Tannadyce. "I shall be seeing him in the course of a day or two."

"Then," pleaded the unhappy girl, unconsciously clasping her hands, "may I beseech you not to inform him that an old neighbour of his has come to this wretched pass. He might make inquiries, and—oh, you can understand how galling it would be!"

"My dear young lady, you may rely on my behaving with the most delicate discretion. I shall say nothing about you to any one," was the specious reply, which was interrupted by the return of the locksmith. Tannadyce waited till the new lock had been fitted, and Nance, having secured the door and pocketed the new key, he accompanied her to the entrance of the court. With a seeming delicacy which he knew would make its mark, he raised his hat, and bade her good-bye without introducing himself or evincing any desire to learn her name.

For a moment he stood with his handkerchief

fluttering in his hand, then turned and walked in the opposite direction. "Positively charming," he muttered. "I mustn't be seen in the matter of breaking her apparent treachery to Sir Charles, but that can easily be managed. She shall queen it at the Abbey in far grander style as my wife than if she were mated with a bankrupt baronet. Ah, there goes Skinner in pursuit—much more judicious than scaring the pretty bird by asking for her private address."

And with a final chuckle for his "friend" Hooligan's discomfiture when he should find the filched key unavailing, the magnate of the money-bags leaped into a passing hansom and was gone.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A " STOP-PRESS " ITEM

MR. ALFRED SKINNER, the groom-coachman who was following Nance in Tannadyce's private cab, belonged to that estimable class described as " valuable servants." His relations with a master who frequented many of the night resorts of the Metropolis, and kept the most irregular hours, were naturally of a confidential nature, and Skinner's chief value lay in the fact that he never abused that confidence.

His handsome wages were earned by carrying out his orders, sometimes very extraordinary ones, with absolute fidelity, and by keeping his mouth shut about them afterwards. The other grooms in the mews where the smart equipage was stabled could never get a word out of him, either as to his master's habits or his own discomforts. He would bring the cab home at five o'clock in the morning after being out all night with the demure air of a bishop's coachman returning from an afternoon confirmation service.

Another point appreciated by his employer was an entire absence of surprise or curiosity under any circumstances whatever. If he felt those emotions

he was at particular pains to conceal them, and would have obeyed an order to drive through a shop window without worrying for reasons.

"He's like the Dutchman's parrot," Tannadyce was wont to praise him behind his back. "He doesn't say much."

"No," Hooligan would answer; "but he thinks a confounded sight the more. I'm not partial to Skinner."

And the antipathy was mutual, for of all his duties the one which most nearly drove this self-contained, silent, respectful, smart-looking young man to revolt was the one of sometimes having to drive on his master's business the foul-mouthed, blatant peer who was as much that master's servant as he was himself.

Such was the sleuth-hound whom Tannadyce had let loose on Nance's trail as she made all speed to return to Islington. The chase was simple and straightforward. Turning up Chancery Lane, she crossed Holborn and struck into the Gray's Inn Road, where she entered a 'bus, and to jog along quietly in the wake of the public vehicle with an eye for stoppages was an easy matter. It was not till the girl descended at the corner of Beaker and Upper Streets, and disappeared into the deserted loneliness of the former, that Skinner's fine qualities were called into play.

Then, suddenly, he found himself hampered by the difficulty of walking his horse so slowly that the silver collar bells did not jingle, and yet of keeping near enough to the graceful, flitting figure ahead to see that it did not enter one of the exactly similar houses without his being able to note the number. Both these feats he accomplished satisfactorily, and he had just marked down his quarry to the door of the Bremner's modest domicile when he uncon-

sciously emitted a low whistle that nearly gave him away.

In inserting her latchkey Nance had to turn her side-face, and Skinner who had so far only paid attention to her clothes, recognized her at once as the girl whom he had seen on Epsom Downs at sunrise on the previous day talking to Starlight's owner.

But Nance was too preoccupied with anxiety about her father and with her own troubles to heed anything, and she passed into the house in ignorance that twenty paces away a cab was wheeling noiselessly on its rubber tyres, to steal back the way it had come.

Having fulfilled his mission, Skinner felt in need of refreshment before returning to the West End. It was three o'clock, long past his dinner-time, and the *Union Jack* at the corner of the street offered attractions which he could not resist. Enlisting the services of a loafer to mind his horse, he entered the saloon bar and called for sandwiches and a glass of bitter.

At that hour the bar was nearly deserted, only the bulky frame of Mr. Tidmarsh being propped on the stool at the end of the counter. His starting-price book for the day had been completed an hour ago, when the factory hands went back to work from the midday break, and he was waiting results as they should appear in successive editions of the evening papers. But the frown on his massive brow was not due to the fact that he was rather more than "full up" against several "likely winners." He had been down to Lambeth in the morning, and had failed to obtain news of his missing sister.

The human heart is surely a strange piece of mechanism. Here was a man who lived on the

shillings of toiling workers, which none knew better than he they could not afford, fretting himself into a fever over a sister who had treated him none too kindly in the days of her short-lived prosperity. Angels have funny people to weep over sometimes, and perhaps they will spare a tear for Billy Tidmarsh, the ready-money "bookie"—when his time comes.

He roused himself a little at sight of the smart top-booted groom in livery, and, as the only other occupant of the bar, did the honours by remarking on the weather.

Skinner, with his mouth full of sandwich, agreed that it was a nice day.

"Doing anything at Kempton to-day?" inquired Tidmarsh affably, with a possible eye to business.

"I don't bet," replied Skinner curtly.

The big man re-settled himself on to his stool with melancholy resignation, which was, however. almost immediately broken by the entrance of Frank Bremner. The lawyer's clerk was waving a newspaper, and seemed to be labouring under great excitement as he approached his friend.

"Look here, Billy, don't lose heart; but I wonder f this has anything to do with your trouble?" he said. "It's an early *Star*, and there's a stop-press paragraph that it struck me you ought to see. Here, you've gone all to pieces; I'll read it off to you."

And this was the announcement which Bremner read aloud, indifferent in his excitement, to the presence of the groom at his elbow—

"*The body of an unknown woman, aged about five-and-twenty, was found in the gorse on Epsom Downs this morning. She was wearing a black cloth jacket and a crimson skirt. There is no doubt that she met her death by strangulation, the marks of a signet ring being plainly visible on the throat.*"

Tidmarsh lurched heavily down from his stool

and supported himself against the counter. He was trembling all over.

"Brandy, Miss—a double go, please," he said to the astonished barmaid. Billy was an abstemious man for one of his calling, and she could only imagine that he had had news of a "bad race."

He did not speak till he had swallowed his liquor, nearly neat, in two gulps. Then he turned to Bremner, who had been watching him curiously.

"Thanks, old man; that's her—that's Bessie right enough," he said in a voice which the brandy had failed to steady. "She was clothed just like that, and the age tallies. I must be off to Epsom and—and make sure."

"But whatever could she have been doing down there?" Bremner asked. "Had she friends at Epsom?"

"No, but she must have had a pretty bad enemy, and as there's a heaven above us I'll track him down, if it takes me twenty years," Tidmarsh replied with suppressed passion, adding softly, but not so softly that the alert Skinner did not overhear, "Poor Bess! How she could sing, too. Well, so long, Frank, I'll slip down to Waterloo and catch the next train. See you to-night."

He evidently had no wish for company, so Bremner let him go and remained to drink a glass of ale before returning to the offices of Nathan and Nathan. He had chanced to be on a writ-serving errand in the neighbourhood of his own home, and, having bought a paper in the hope of finding himself a winner over the first race at Kempton, had thus been able to bring early intelligence to Tidmarsh.

He put down his glass and was turning away when Skinner, who had been something more than an observant spectator of the episode, touched him

on the arm and said, "How are you, sir? You know me—Mr. Tannadyce's groom."

Mr. Leopold Tannadyce was a valued client of Messrs. Nathan and Nathan, and Bremner would have recognized Skinner before but for his preoccupation. The smart private cab often brought the moneylender to the solicitor's offices and Skinner had a nodding acquaintance with most of the junior clerks.

"Oh, how d'ye do," said Bremner. "But what are you up to in these parts? Your governor hasn't taken one of the palatial abodes in Beaker Street, eh? We want some rich neighbours to borrow a bit from now and then."

"I'm only here on a message," replied the discreet Skinner, adding with polite interest, "you live in Beaker Street, then?"

"Yes, No. 42 is where I pillow my dainty head when I've finished the daily round of serving writs on other people and dodging 'em myself," said Bremner facetiously.

Not by the wink of an eyelash did Skinner show that 42 was the number pencilled on his shirt-cuff as the house to which he had traced the girl in whom his master was interested. He simply added to his growing store of information the fact that she had gone into a house inhabited by one of Nathan and Nathan's clerks, and changed the subject to one of far greater significance to himself.

"Your friend seemed to have got the hump—been upset by bad news or something?" he remarked in a careless tone.

As a lawyer's clerk, it was not Bremner's practice to be communicative to strangers, but the trusted servant of a client of the firm hardly came under that category, and he spread the newspaper on the counter, pointing to the paragraph. The

groom read it slowly, following each word with his finger.

"That woman, friend Skinner, if I'm not very much mistaken, will turn out to be Bessie Beckford, the once celebrated music-hall artist," said Bremner impressively. "Her real name was Tidmarsh, and she was that chap's sister. She dropped out a while back, but I dare say you remember her."

What was it that made the shrewd, silent groom turn the colour of cartridge paper and sway slightly at that moment, recovering himself, however, so quickly that Bremner noticed nothing? "I don't go to music-halls—except to wait outside them in the cab," he replied, with a shake of his head. "Well, good-bye, sir; I must drive back now."

With which he quitted the bar abruptly and *did* drive back—in a manner that must have narrowly escaped being described as "furious" in a charge-sheet next morning. It is very certain that the two hundred guinea blood mare had never been driven so fast through London streets before, for she was made to cover the distance from Islington to the foot of Regent Street in something under twenty minutes.

At the door of Tannadyce's offices Skinner called the hall-porter to mind the cab and rushed into the building, not stopping till he came to the gorgeously upholstered private room where the human spider was wont to spin his webs. The spider was finishing his correspondence, preparatory to knocking off work for the day, and looked up in surprise at the unceremonious entry of his usually staid favourite. But after Skinner had whispered a few agitated words in his ear surprise gave place to anger, none the less deep because it was strenuously controlled. Only by the ominous frown and the bared white teeth that suggested a snarl did

Leopold Tannadyce show how the communication had moved him.

"The thrice-sodden idiot!" he hissed. "You are sure of your facts, Alf—this is no stupid blunder on your part?"

"I don't think you've found me make many mistakes, sir. I'd stand cross-examination on it by Gill or Avory," replied Skinner imperturbably.

Tannadyce stabbed his blotting-pad with a silver paper-knife and thought hard. Five years had been added to his appearance in the last five minutes.

"See here, Alf," he said, looking up at length and eyeing his servant rather nervously, "there must be no nonsense, mind, of the sort you propose. You must keep your mouth shut, and things must go on as before. We're all in it, you know—you as deep as any one. Deeper than most, in fact."

"I draw the line at murder, though," said Skinner sullenly.

"Of course you do, and so should I; but I also draw the line at spending a year or two in a prison cell, my friend, which is what you and I would have to do if there was an all-round flare-up, entailing exposure of our part in those private theatricals last year."

"Would it be so bad as that, sir?"

"Undoubtedly it would."

The groom clenched his thin, clean-shaven lips and reluctantly yielded the debatable point. "Well, you know best, sir; I've no particular wish to go to gaol," he said. "I didn't like the job at the time, and I like it worse now, but I'll keep a still tongue—unless he aggravates me too much. It would be wise of you to keep us apart, so far as you can."

Skinner was turning away, but his master called him back and reminded him that he had not reported about the lady.

"I beg pardon, sir; this other thing drove it out of my head," was the reply. "She lives at 42, Beaker Street, Islington, in the house of a man named Bremner—one of Nathan's clerks. And if you don't know it already you ought to know that she was on the downs that morning, talking to the gentleman that owned the racehorses."

Tannadyce nodded without comment, but when Skinner had retired he leaned his head on his hand and muttered, "Who would have thought of that woman cropping up at this juncture. I shall have to reshuffle the pack, but it's a pity I can't do without the King of Clubs."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE INSPECTOR WANTS TO KNOW

INSPECTOR JOSIAH CROAL, of the Criminal Investigation Department, was suffering grave bodily discomfort. His sufferings were due to a modest shyness quite out of proportion to the distinguished position he held in the force, but as his shyness was, so to speak, "all in the day's work," it need not be accepted as a permanent trait in his character.

Wedged into a crowd of perspiring spectators at the back of the room, he had purposely chosen the situation so as to avoid the fierce light that beats on successful detectives, while watching the inquest on the body of a "woman unknown" found on the adjacent downs. The inquiry was being held at the *Derby Arms*, within a stone's throw of the classic racecourse. Ostensibly the conduct of the case was in the hands of the county police, but, recognizing that a mysterious murder had been committed, "the Yard" had deputed Mr. Croal to assist the local authorities.

He was an unobtrusive looking person, this trained bloodhound of the law, of medium height and wiry figure, and dressed for the occasion in garments least likely to attract attention in a sporting

community. By his drab gaiters and well-worn cut-away coat he might have been mistaken for the "head lad" at one of the training stables, or at least an ostler at a prosperous hotel.

There was nothing particular about the inspector's face to call for remark, except perhaps an underhung chin and massive jaw, which, in conjunction with an expression of friendly good-nature, gave him the look of an amiable bulldog—of kindly habits but terribly tenacious grip.

The rumour had already leaked out that the description of the remains as "unknown" was no longer applicable, and that the first witness called would be as to identification.

In common with the other spectators, Mr. Croal craned his head as a big man in a loud check suit made his way to the end of the table and faced the coroner. Being sworn, he gave his name as William Tidmarsh, frankly describing himself as a bookmaker, and said that, having come to Epsom the previous afternoon in consequence of a newspaper report, he had at once recognized the deceased as his sister. She was formerly known on the variety stage as Bessie Beckford, but had lately been living at Tresidder Crescent, Lambeth, under her maiden name of Tidmarsh. She had been missing from her lodgings for three days.

"When did you last see her alive?" questioned the coroner.

"About ten days ago, when I went to take her the little bit I allowed her," replied Billy sadly.

"Then she was dependent on you?"

"I've kept her ever since the bust-up—ever since the scoundrel that killed her deserted her, my lord," was the startling answer. To Mr. Tidmarsh every exponent of justice was "my lord" to his face and "the beak" elsewhere.

The coroner was far too experienced to show that he attached importance to the witness's excitement, or even to inquire directly the name of the person against whom such an overwhelming accusation was made.

"I think, Mr. Tidmarsh," he said blandly, "that you had better give us the facts of your sister's history in your own way, remembering that unless you can produce actual proof it would be well to avoid bringing charges against any one."

"That's where it is—I can't charge anybody," Tidmarsh blurted. "I never heard the chap's name, nor yet saw him, begging your lordship's pardon, and excusing my agitation. It was like this: Half the young blades about town were a courting her. One, a bigger blackguard than the rest, offered to marry her, and as he happened to be the fancy man of the lot, she consented, and they went through what turned out to be a bogus ceremony in what she thought was a registry office. But the chap wasn't a registrar at all—only a faked-up bogus, and the marriage wasn't worth kiss your hand. In a couple of months the chap tired of her and chucked her, and she crept back from the country place where they'd been staying a desolate woman, my lord."

The coroner regarded the loud-lunged, emotional witness with a tolerant eye. He was a man of the world, and had often laughed at Bessie Beckford's whimsicalities from the stalls of the music-halls in her palmy days.

"But did she never tell you who the man was?" he inquired kindly.

"Never. I couldn't get her to give his name. It's my belief she loved him to the end, or pretty nearly, and then something set her back up and she worried him, perhaps, poor girl, and then——

But you've ruled it, my lord, that I'm not to bring charges I can't prove. But, by heaven, I'll find something stiffer than charges for him when I lay a hold on him."

"I am sure you have my sympathy and that of the jury, Mr. Tidmarsh," said the coroner soothingly. "We will take the evidence of the finder of the body next, please."

It was Tom Barron, Sir Charles Roylance's trainer, who stepped to the front at this intimation. Tersely and lucidly the natty hard-baked little man described how he had been crossing the Downs about noon the day before, on his way back to his house from the town, when, on passing near a patch of gorse, his eye had been caught by a spot of colour in the bushes. On going to the place he had found the deceased woman in a kneeling position, with her neck hitched in the fork of the gorse-bush, and quite stiff and cold. He had promptly procured assistance and communicated with the police.

"The gorse patch is not far from your house, Mr. Barron, I believe. Had you seen the poor creature about before her death?" the coroner asked.

The trainer replied that he had never set eyes on her till he found her dead. Further questioned, he said that he had not passed close enough to the bushes to observe anything for several days, so he could form no opinion how long she had been there.

"Stay, though!" added Barron, struck by an afterthought. "She can't have been there more than a day or so, because there was a young lady through that gorse early the day before yesterday, while my string was out at exercise. We thought she was a tout at first, but she turned out to be a friend of Sir Charles Roylance. She'd have seen the body if it had been there then."

Mr. Inspector Croal craned his head just a little further forward to hear the coroner's next question, which was put almost in the words he would have used himself—

"Can you give us this lady's name?"

"No, sir; not knowing it I am unable to do so," was the trainer's reply.

"You are sure she was a friend of Sir Charles Roylance?"

"No doubt of that, sir," said Barron confidently. "She was quite the lady, and she and Sir Charles were chatting private and friendly after a little bit of a trial spin we were having."

The coroner expressed himself satisfied and told Mr. Barron he might stand aside, though the inspector would have wished to hear a little more about the young lady, who must have been on the scene of the crime within a few hours of it, and after being taken for a horse-watcher had proved to be on friendly terms with the well-known and popular young baronet.

"Funny time of day for a girl to be on Epsom Downs unless she was there by invitation to see the trial, and that does not seem to have been the case," he reflected.

However, his thoughts were diverted into a new channel by the evidence of the surgeon who had examined the remains both before and after removal. The medical testimony was to the effect that the woman had been strangled by the pressure of a powerful grasp on the windpipe, that the murderer had quitted the victim before she was quite dead, and that she had then struggled into a kneeling position, only to fall forward and expire almost immediately, with her neck caught in the fork of the gorse-bush.

"Have you formed an opinion as to how long

she had been dead when you were called to her ? " was the coroner's question when the murmur of execration had subsided.

" By the indications of dew on the clothing the body had certainly been there one night—possibly two," replied the surgeon. " It could not have been for longer, as decomposition had not set in."

" Now, doctor, as to the mark on the throat—just describe that to the jury, please."

" I found a well-defined circular impression, which I attribute to the assailant having worn a signet ring, which, in exerting pressure on the windpipe with his thumbs, he must have dug into the flesh of the neck. There is a faint mark in the centre of the circle, which may have been caused by a crest or monogram engraved on the seal. It is quite undistinguishable, but I have had the mark photographed, and it is just possible that better results may be obtained when the photograph has been enlarged."

" The person who committed this dastardly crime must have been a man, I presume ? "

" Unquestionably, and of considerable physical strength," the surgeon answered.

This concluded the available evidence, and the coroner having briefly summed up, the jury, by his direction, returned a verdict of " Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown." Mr. Inspector Croal sauntered out into the sunlight and stretched his cramped limbs in the roadway while the spectators dispersed. He waited till Billy Tidmarsh, very glum and sorrowful after settling formalities connected with the burial, came out, and went up and introduced himself. Billy looked him up and down and took a fancy to him.

" I ain't partial to detectives as a rule, Mr. Croal," the bookmaker replied to the detective's

hope of being able to trace the criminal. "'Taint on the cards for you and me to pull together, unless you wink the other eye when you look me up at my house of call."

"Bah, Mr. Tidmarsh, let's leave trifles like that to the police of your division," said Mr. Croal genially. "They're probably a good deal cleverer at that sort of fooling than I am, and, anyhow, they haven't caught you yet. But this is a big thing, and I shan't be happy till I've run down the brute that killed your sister. Where shall I find you if I want you?"

"At the *Union Jack*, Islington," said Tidmarsh. "But I'm open to lay you a hundred to eight I'm in at the death first, and I'll engage it *shall* be a death. There won't be a living man for you to clap the handcuffs on, Mr. Croal—soon as I've found him."

"For your sake I'd better make a race of it, then, Mr. Tidmarsh," said the Inspector drily, as he turned away.

## CHAPTER X

### AN INTERRUPTED PROPOSAL

A PEACEFUL Sunday morning, and a party of four walking home from church across the lush green water-meadows flanking the silver Thames. The erect, austere spinster of uncertain age, escorted by Mr. Quintree, the rector of the parish, was Lady Alice Mashiter, the aunt of Sir Charles Roylance, who followed close behind with Nance Beauchamp.

In spite of his delight at having induced Nance to accept Lady Alice's invitation to stay at Barfield from Saturday to Monday, there was a cloud on Sir Charles' brow. He had received news from his turf commissioner that Starlight was being nibbled at in the betting market, with the result that it was becoming almost hopeless to win anything like the stake necessary to free him from Tannadyce's clutches. This was the more annoying because the leakage of their great stable secret was unaccountable.

Nance, too, though happy to be walking at her old playmate's side, was not the blithe maiden he had known in the days of old. The events of the

past week had shaken and humiliated her. She felt acutely her false position towards Sir Charles, though commonsense told her she must not blame herself unduly for the havoc "Parker's Lightning Finals" had wrought on his prospects. She had suffered gross indignity to prevent it, and she tried to comfort herself with the reflection that if Lord Hooligan had not bought up their office he would have gone to another in which Sir Charles would have had no secret friend eager to serve him if the chance offered.

For she had chiefly accepted Lady Alice's invitation so that she might discover whether the injury done by Hooligan's circular was irreparable. Her father had quite recovered from his stroke, and had spent the last two days at the office in Red Lion Court, busily engaged in tipping Starlight to the new subscribers who kept pouring in. Nance had been powerless to prevent it, for Hooligan had dropped in several times a day and posted the letters himself, with Mr. Beauchamp's concurrence. The girl had forborne from agitating the old gentleman by telling him of the outrage on the day of his absence, contenting herself with reporting that Hooligan had insisted on having his way. This Mr. Beauchamp had obstinately approved of, maintaining that his partner was within his rights, and, the mischief having been done, Nance ceased to protest.

Hooligan had not referred to his conduct, but had shown by his sullen scowls that he had not forgiven her mysterious escape from the office, to which he had returned from his Fleet Street carouse only to find the outer door locked and the bird presumably flown.

A minor trouble that added to Nance's discomfort this morning was finding herself in association

with the clergyman who had sought the advice of "Mr. Parker" on turf matters during her captivity in the cupboard. Not only did it remind her of a very unpleasant incident, but it lessened her self-respect. How could she honestly despise a man who was playing a double part when she was playing a double part herself?

Instinctively the young people dropped back, allowing the elderly couple to gain on them till they could converse without being overheard.

"This is quite like the dear old times when we used to wander in the fields round the Abbey," said Starlight's owner, looking down with open tenderness at the beautiful patient face. "Do you know, Nance," he went on without waiting for a reply, "I would almost give the Abbey itself, much as I love it, to have those days back again—that is if it was mine to give."

"Is it really so bad as that, Charley?" Nance murmured. "Could you not persuade the person who holds the mortgages to wait till things take a turn for the better?"

At mention of his creditor a frown crossed Sir Charles' face, even in that fair company.

"The beggar won't wait a day," he answered. "He has made a fortune by bleeding such fools as me, and I am told he wants my ancestral home to cut a dash in himself. And now my last chance of keeping him at bay is vanishing in this rush of the public to back my colt."

Something like a sob from the girl caused him to check his despondent flow. "What is it, little playmate?" he asked gently. "Do you really care so much?"

"I would cut off my right hand to help you. Oh, if you would only show me how," Nance pleaded up at him.

"Tell me, girlie, is it the loss of the old home of the Roylances that you feel so much, or can it be that your sweet sympathy is for the unlucky chap who has flung away his patrimony? If I thought——"

But alas for love-making in the wake of an elderly couple who have to climb over a stile. So engrossed had the young people been with each other that they had not perceived that they had nearly caught up Mr. Quintree and Lady Alice, who were engaged in performing that feat. Sir Charles waited till the reverend gentleman had helped the spinster down into the road, intending to continue his passionate outburst on the other side of the obstacle.

He purposely took time in assisting Nance over the stile, so as to let the others draw ahead again, but the manœuvre was of no avail. He and Nance had no sooner descended into the road than a respectably-dressed man, who appeared to have been lounging under the hedge, stepped up and raised his bowler hat, saying—

"Sir Charles Roylance, I believe?"

"That is my name, sir."

"Can you give me a word on strictly private and very urgent business? I won't detain you for more than a few minutes."

The man had honest, shrewd eyes, and Sir Charles, with an apology to Nance, led him a little way aside.

"I am Inspector Croal, sir, of the Criminal Investigation Department," began the lounger. "You have read of the Epsom murder in the papers?"

"Just glanced at it," said Sir Charles. "I know nothing about it, but my trainer Barron's evidence seemed quite correct."

"So I should have supposed, Sir Charles. Mr. Barron is, of course, above reproach," replied the inspector, extracting a telegram from his pocket-book. "But I received this this morning, and thought I had better run down here and verify it, as it is Sunday, and there was no one at the office in Red Lion Court."

Roylance took the telegram, and read—

"*To Inspector Croal, New Scotland Yard.*

"*Epsom murder. The girl who came out of the gorse bushes and was described as a friend of Sir Charles Roylance is the daughter of a tipster who runs an office in Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, under the title of 'Parker's Lightning Finals.'*"

Sir Charles broke into such hearty laughter that it reached Lady Alice Mashiter and Mr. Quintree, who both turned round.

"I say, Nance, this is too rich!" cried the baronet to the dainty figure on the opposite side of the road. "Here's a worthy detective come from town who says that you're running a racing tipster's office in Fleet Street."

And, turning to the inspector, he added: "Your anonymous informant has got hold of the wrong end of the stick, my friend. This is the young lady whom he elegantly describes as 'the girl who came out of the gorse bushes'—Miss Beauchamp, late of Beauchamp Grange, Berkshire. I have known her from childhood."

Nance came slowly across the road, her brain striving to grapple with the imminent catastrophe. Her natural inclination was to make a clean breast of everything, admit her connexion with the hated office, and trust to the chivalry of Sir Charles to see her actions in their true light.

But swift on the heels of that determination came the thought that only by preserving her secret could she hope to stem the tide of injury which Hooligan was launching against him. So long as "Parker's Lightning Finals" was undermining Roylance's interests, so long would those interests best be served by a Roylance partisan in the enemy's camp. Yes; her lips were sealed—she must continue the deception.

Whether the decision was right or wrong it was favoured by the inspector's unhesitating acceptance of Sir Charles' statement. Raising his hat to Nance, he expressed his unfeigned annoyance that he should have been sent on a fool's errand by some one who doubtless had an evil motive in dispatching the anonymous telegram.

"Oh, I'm sure Miss Beauchamp will forgive you, Mr. Croal," Sir Charles stopped him lightly. "The thing's too funny for anger, you know. Is it permitted to ask what theory you would have based on that telegram if it had proved to be true?"

"Well, you see," said the detective with a smile for Nance, "it would have been my duty to look closely into the movements and antecedents of a young woman engaged in a tipping office, on the chance of being able to connect her with the murder of that unfortunate female. I need hardly say that in the case of Miss Beauchamp such investigation becomes unnecessary."

"Murder!" cried Nance, shrinking back. "Who has been murdered?"

This was no acting. With her own troubles to absorb her the girl had not looked at a newspaper for days and knew nothing of the discovery on the Downs and the subsequent inquest.

"What! haven't you heard?" said Sir Charles.

"Our impromptu tryst on the Downs the other day must have occurred close to the scene of a tragedy. The body of a woman has been found in those gorse bushes."

"How horrible!" faltered Nance, as the ghastly face and the whisper flooded back to her memory. And then, with a supreme effort, she pulled herself together and added, "No; I have heard nothing of it at all."

"Then," said the inspector. "my errand hasn't been a fool's one after all. I am indebted to my unknown correspondent for being able to place the time of the crime as later than your early morning trial, Sir Charles. With such testimony as Miss Beauchamp's we may accept that as beyond doubt. And now I have detained you far too long; I will catch the next train back to town."

He had taken a few steps down the road when he quickly retraced them. "I think I had better trouble you for your address, Miss Beauchamp," he said. "I will see that you are not worried in the matter unless it is absolutely necessary; but in the event of my making an arrest your evidence might be wanted."

It was Sir Charles who came to the rescue—not from any suspicion of Nance's secret but to shield her from having to confess to such a humble domicile as Beaker Street.

"Miss Beauchamp is staying with Lady Alice Mashiter at The Hollies, in this village," he replied quickly. "You will always be able to hear of her there."

"That was good of you," said Nance, with a choke in her voice, when the detective had finally turned away. But there was no opportunity for resuming the tender passages interrupted by Mr.

Croal, for Lady Alice and Mr. Quintree had waited to be overtaken, eager to learn who the stranger was.

Sir Charles enlightened them, and, full of the joke, as he considered it, inflicted untold torture on the girl at his side by narrating the details of the inspector's discomfiture.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Quintree. "Took her for a person from a tipster's office, did he—'Parker's Lightning Finals,' too. What a wicked designation for an—er—horrible pursuit."

"I cannot imagine a greater insult to offer to a lady," commented Lady Alice severely. "The man ought to be dismissed the force. I hope, my dear Miss Beauchamp, that you will accept my regrets that you should have been subjected to such an outrage while my guest."

Poor Nance! What with the falsehood of her position and the looming clouds ahead the joy of the summer day was gone for her. All the rest of it she spent in wondering whether that keen-eyed detective would turn up in Red Lion Court, and in shuddering at the horrid thought that she must have been accosted by the murderer within a few minutes of his crime.

He knew her, too, or how could he have addressed her in that whispered threat as "Miss Parker's Finals"? And there must be some one else, too, who was aware of her presence on the Downs that morning—the sender of the anonymous telegram to Scotland Yard.

Lord Hooligan must be one of them, she was assured—either murderer or informant—but which could it be? The tentacles of the gruesome mystery seemed to envelop her as closely as the tangled web of deceit that she loathed.

She felt that she possessed the key to the murder

mystery, yet love held her back from using it till she had saved Roylance Abbey for its owner. And already the germ of an idea for achieving that purpose was taking shape in her mind.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE LION RAMPANT

INSPECTOR CROAL did not quit tbe pleasant riverside village immediately. It being Sunday, trains were few and far between, and finding on reaching the station that there was nothing to take him back to town for a couple of hours he strolled up the street in search of refreshment.

There was only one inn in the place, the *Angler's Rest*—a snug, bow-windowed house fronting on the village green, with a lawn behind, running down to a little landing-stage where a few punts and a skiff or two were moored. Croal walked into the low-ceiled coffee-room, and was there joined by a plump landlady who took his order for a chop and a pint of bitter with voluble affability.

When she had departed Croal walked to the window and looked out on the gently gliding stream, seeing but not thinking of the fussy steam launches and pleasure-boats that met his abstracted gaze. He was not at all disheartened by the result of his journey, having, as he thought, narrowed the inquiry to the time subsequent to the trial spin. And even in the anonymous telegram itself, abortive though it was for the moment, it might have its uses in directing his research into channels he

would not otherwise have thought of. He was far too thorough in his methods to dismiss "Parker's" from the investigation because his first essay in that direction had led him to a mare's nest, and he promised himself an early call in Red Lion Court.

Having settled this point, he turned from the window, and to pass the time began to idly scan the pages of a "visitors' book," kept to record the signatures of guests and their opinion of their entertainment. Presently he came upon a blank sheet of notepaper between the leaves, which, though absolutely devoid of writing, filled him with a strange and sudden interest.

At the head of the sheet of notepaper was a crest stamped in red relief, the device being the fantastic figure known in heraldry as a "lion rampant."

Laying the sheet down, he extracted from his pocket-book two slips—one a written memorandum and the other a photographic print, so blurred and formless that to ordinary eyes it would have represented nothing at all. It was an enlargement from the original negative taken of the mark on the murdered woman's throat, and the written paper was the report of the Government specialist who had done the work.

"The enlargement is not satisfactory," he wrote, "the mark having failed to yield sufficient definition to enable one to judge of the design with any certainty. It proves, however, that the ring was engraved with a crest—not a monogram—and it was probably an animal of some kind. But whether a boar's head, or a griffin, or a lion rampant it is impossible to say."

The inspector had scrutinized the photograph a hundred times already, and had come to the same conclusion. A comparison with the crest on the

notepaper brought him no further, and he shook his head doubtfully.

"It might be a lion, or a dancing pig, or a poodle sitting up and begging," he muttered. "And when all's said and done there's not much of a clue in a rampant lion, that being about the commonest crest there is. When I was a youngster on point duty at Hyde Park Corner, getting the knack of noting things, about every other barouche that drove into the Row had one of those things on the panels."

All the same, when the landlady came bustling in with his chop he drew her attention to the sheet of paper. He was struck at once by the change in her countenance from smiling complacency to unfeigned disgust.

"That must have been left by some people that stayed here in the spring of last year," she said gravely, as though the reminiscence were an unpleasant one. "I didn't know it was in the book, but they used paper like that."

"Howling swells, I suppose?" replied Mr. Croal carelessly, as he seated himself before the smoking dish.

"Oh, dear, no, sir; I should say it was a butcher and his bride on their honeymoon," returned the landlady, lingering as though not loth to gossip. "It began all as sweet as treacle, and ended—well, I wished I'd never took 'em in."

"Ah, people often get a bit fidgety towards the end of a honeymoon, but it mostly comes all right afterwards," remarked the inspector, sousing his chop with tomato sauce.

"Fidgety wasn't the word for it, sir," said the landlady with retrospective indignation. "He was just a downright great hulking brute, seldom sober, and using language that I should be sorry to hear

from the bargees on the towpath yonder. He treated her like dirt after the first month, and at the end of the second bolted with all her jewellery. And she had a tidy lot, too."

"Poor creature! And how unpleasant for you, Mrs. Timmins," said Croal persuasively. "And what might have been the name of this interesting couple?"

"They called themselves Smith; but, of course, that goes for nothing," was the landlady's answer.

"And the man had the manners of a drunken navvy, you say, and the appearance of a journeyman butcher. Strange for such people to have a crest on their notepaper," Croal mused aloud. "Perhaps she was a lady, run off with some one below her in station?"

But Mrs. Timmins promptly blocked that solution by asserting that the victim of the brutal husband did not come of gentle stock. "A rough, good-natured young woman, sir, of the London style; but nothing classy about her," was the landlady's verdict. "She was high-spirited when she first came to stay here, but she was a poor, broken thing when she crawled down to the station, with just five shillings in her purse, she told me, after he'd bolted. Yet, with it all, I believe she was fond of him, and was mad for him to come back to her."

The inspector attacked his plate vigorously, and Mrs. Timmins took the hint and withdrew, leaving him to enjoy his meal. But it was really a "feast of reason" that engrossed the trained intelligence of Mr. Croal during the remainder of his stay at the *Angler's Rest*, and when he quitted the old hostelry to go to the station a subdued fire burned in his deep-set eyes.

"I can go one better than my friend the Home

Office photographer," he murmured, as he settled himself in the seclusion of a second-class carriage, " for I can put a name to that curious beast on the blurred picture. It's a rampant lion, sure enough, and the female honeymooner at the inn was Billy Tidmarsh's sister. But who was the wearer of the rampant lion signet, who, by the way, must have been a curious sort of beast himself? When I can put a name to him—well, it'll be about time to apply for a warrant."

Mr. Inspector Croal put a handkerchief over his head and slept till his ticket was demanded at Vauxhall, but he must have been pursuing the same train of thought in his dreams, for he remarked softly to himself: " Funny that I should have picked up this little clue all through being lumbered on to that nice aristocratic Miss Beauchamp! A tipping-office girl, ha! ha! Why, though naturally upset by the attentions of a gentleman from ' the Yard,' she looked fit to grace a Court Drawing-room. But where do ' Parker's Lightning Finals ' come in, I wonder? "

## CHAPTER XII

### THE SKYLIGHT IN THE ROOF

THERE need be no secret about this matter. Mr. Leopold Tannadyce was the author of the anonymous telegram which inadvertently furnished Mr. Croal with the clue he was so pleased with. The object of the moneylender was to create a breach between Sir Charles Roylance and Nance Beauchamp by disclosing to the baronet, through the unwitting mouth of the detective, that Nance was engaged in the dissemination of turf advice.

He had carefully planned to send his information on Sunday morning, counting on Croal being in such a haste to verify it that, not being able to do so at the closed office in the court, he would go down to Barfield to make inquiries of Sir Charles. But he had not foreseen the check which Croal would get in a great measure owing to Nance's presence in the riverside village, of which he was ignorant. Still less could he have foreseen the chance discoveries the inspector was to stumble on at the *Angler's Rest*.

So it was that two days later Tannadyce grew impatient to learn whether his mean artifice had succeeded, and when Hooligan swaggered into his private room for instructions he tried to pump him

on the subject. By a sort of tacit consent, no reference had been made between the two to the tragedy on the Downs, though in these days the confederates had taken to eyeing each other furtively, as if striving to fathom the mind of the other. Otherwise their outward relations were the same.

"You never told me the sequel of your little game with Miss Parker. Did you find her more amenable when you went back to let her out?" Tannadyce inquired carelessly.

"She got let out, confound her!" Hooligan snapped viciously.

"How is she behaving—down on her luck since you got the better of her?"

"If she is she doesn't show it. She just looks knives at me when I do a bit of preaching to the old man about the way we're sending Starlight up in the betting."

"That doesn't look as if she had fallen out with Roylance," remarked Tannadyce meditatively. "I think, Hooly," he went on after a pause, "that in view of future contingencies it would be well to knock on the head any friendship, past or present, between those two pretty dears. I should like you to run down to the place Roylance is staying at on the river and spend a few nights at the inn. You could get into conversation with him and blurt it out that the girl he was talking to at the trial gave him away in the ordinary course of her vocation as a tipster. Barfield is the name of the village where he has a furnished cottage."

Lord Hooligan's coarse, red face flushed purple, and his thick lips quivered tremulously. "No, I'll be hanged if I do it. I'll be hanged if I'll go to Barfield-on-Thames," he answered with sullen rage that he should be expected to do this man's bidding—above all, such bidding as that.

Tannadyce regarded him with the critical gaze of a huntsman endeavouring to account for the mutiny of a usually obedient hound. Apparently he succeeded.

"I see," he said slowly, keeping his beady black eyes on Hooligan's face, "that I shall have to do it another way. It would be trying you rather too high if Barfield was the idyllic spot where——"

"Drop it!" cried Hooligan furiously, advancing to the table, where Tannadyce sat unmoved, but with a warning finger hovering over the call-bell.

"Don't you think that the intrusion of the police into our affairs at this juncture would be more annoying to you than to me, my lord, if you force me to call them in?" said the financier calmly, adding in a significant undertone, "Croal was at Barfield on Sunday."

The two men stared at each other with open enmity at first, then with a dawning comprehension of mutual interests. Finally Hooligan broke into a sheepish laugh.

"I'm a bit below par," he grunted. "You mustn't take any notice of me. Tann. But was that—that detective fellow really there?"

"Yes, but not with any knowledge that need alarm you," Tannadyce consoled him, satisfied to have brought his recalcitrant hound to heel. "He went to ask Roylance about that girl at Parker's on the strength of an unsigned wire I sent him. Of course I shouldn't have done it if I had known ——"

"That'll do," Hooligan interrupted. "You've put your foot in it quite enough. That ferret will come prying to the office now, and though the girl can't tell him anything I shall have the jumps all the time."

"Well, jumps won't hurt you, so long as you

don't have to jump in the air," Tannadyce responded cheerfully. "You'd better cut along there now. The fair maiden mustn't be trusted alone too long."

So parted the two allies, and while Hooligan was speeding eastward in a hansom Nance was feverishly busy at the office in Red Lion Court putting into practice a project which she had matured since her return from Barfield on Monday morning. Mr. Beauchamp sat with unseeing eyes in his accustomed Windsor chair, under the impression that his daughter's nimble fingers were folding into their envelopes letters of advice recommending Starlight for the New Century Handicap. The rustle and crackle were certainly caused by the enclosure of printed matter, but it happened to be couched in an exactly opposite strain to what the blind man supposed.

"We have to record with sorrow that our previous advices anent that grand horse Starlight must be cancelled, private information having reached us that the colt is not doing well. There is plenty of time for our clients to hedge, and they had better do so by backing Minster, who, now that our original selection has broken down, may be regarded as a good thing."

Such was the wording of the circular which Nance was striving with might and main to get done up, and, if possible, posted, before Hooligan's arrival. She had had it printed herself, not by the jobbing printer close by, but by another, and she pinned her hope to its knocking Starlight out to such a figure that its owner could back it to advantage. It was all she could do for "Charley," and she did it eagerly, deftly—in spite of the risk

she ran from the titled boor who might appear at any moment, and of the reluctance she felt to deceive that pathetic figure at the other side of the table.

"You are in a great hurry to-day," said Mr. Beauchamp, his sightless eyes directed at the swift crackle of the paper.

"I've got to be, father," Nance replied, fastening down the last of the envelopes and rising for the twentieth time to look out into the court. Yes, there he came at last—the big, burly bully, with the strong cigar clenched between his coarse lips, swaggering over the well-worn stones as though he owned them. It was too late now to run out and post the letters, and she trembled to think what he would do if his mistrust of her prompted him to open one.

Her first impulse, to sweep all the letters into a basket and thrust them into the cupboard till he should have gone, she discarded at once. Her father's quick sense of hearing would tell him what she was doing, and he was aware that she had been enclosing circulars all the morning. Hooligan would be sure to hear from him how busy she had been, and she would be unable to account for having nothing to show for her work.

There was nothing for it but to trust to luck to escape suspicion, and to her woman's wit to devise some expedient for turning it aside if necessary.

The heavy footsteps clattered on the creaky stairs, and Hooligan appeared at the door, flinging it open in his usual unmannerly style. Retaining [illegible] at the window, Nance received his surly [illegible]old stare as he approached the table. [illegible]quick to note a subtle change in him—[illegible]speech, but in his looks and demeanour. [illegible]ing bluster was the same as ever, but

it was accompanied by a curious furtiveness, a tendency to stop and listen and peer over the shoulder, which was in queer contrast to the boisterous tone.

"Well, Parker, old boy, you've been going it, I see—you and the lady help," he began rudely, sitting down and fingering the pile of letters in a way that made Nance's flesh creep. "We shall have to cut up the spoils soon, with all the new subscribers my money has brought in."

"Your lordship's share is at your service whenever you wish," said old Beauchamp, who had much ado to curb his resentment at his partner's manner.

"There were fifty-seven fresh applicants this morning," interposed Nance quickly. "If you like, father, I will run across to the post-office and cash the orders, so that you can have a settlement with Lord Hooligan. I can post this lot of letters at the same time."

Hooligan looked at her with an evil grin. "Not much, you don't," he sneered. "I'd rather wait for the cash than have you dropping all that valuable advice down a sewer grating. That would never do, just as our worthy clients have got Starlight so talked about that they're backing him at the clubs. I wonder how the owner likes it, eh, Parker?"

"Our duty, my lord, as champions of the British thoroughbred is to the British public and not to any owners," replied the old fanatic with a side-shot for Nance. "It is a source of gratification to me to have been able to give advice which I have reason to believe is really sound."

Nance bit her lips with mortification. Her first expedient for getting the spurious circulars posted had failed, and that another would become speedily necessary if she was to escape detection

was apparent from the ominous scowls which Hooligan was casting at the pile on the table. The dull, bemused, but cunning brain was working, and any moment it might break out in dangerous activity.

Taking up one of the envelopes, Hooligan scrutinized the address abstractedly, and Nance, dreading lest a sudden impulse might prompt him to tear it open, was struck with an inspiration. Remembering her argument that Hooligan must either have been the murderer or the author of the anonymous information about her to the police, she hit on a plan which, while solving that question, might serve her present purpose.

Affecting to gaze down into the court, she turned from the window with a swift gesture and a mirthless laugh. "Here is Inspector Croal, of Scotland Yard, making for the door below," she said. "I wonder what he wants?"

The effect upon Hooligan was instant and complete. Kicking over his chair, he sprang up and looked at the door as though inclined to bolt, but realizing that he would only be met on the stairs, he turned all flabby and quaking to Nance.

"The skylight on the landing—does it open?" he asked frantically. "That fellow must not see me here. He—he knows me by sight."

His fright, and the flimsy excuse for it, sent a thrill of horror to Nance's heart, inasmuch as it answered the question as to the part he had played in the mystery of Epsom Downs. Yet, with her purpose to achieve, she forced herself to reply calmly:

"Yes, it opens; I will show you how."

In a twinkling they were both outside the door, and, standing on a chair she had snatched up from the office, Nance undid the catch of a small

glass-paned square opening on to the roof. A second later the hulking frame of Lord Hooligan disappeared through the aperture, his movements accelerated by the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs—an unrehearsed effect in her programme for which Nance was duly thankful.

"Let me out when he's gone," Hooligan called down in a hoarse whisper that made Nance shudder, so suggestive was it of that whisper in the gorse-patch.

"Very well," she replied curtly, and secured the skylight in grim triumph at the success of her artifice. Then she retreated into the office where her blind father sat unmoved by the episode, grasping only the idea that Lord Hooligan desired to conceal his connection with tipsters. Nance had told him nothing of her suspicions, and he was quite prepared to aid in shielding his unpleasant partner from a disclosure which it seemed natural he should wish to avoid.

Nance had just finished sweeping the letters into the basket, when there came a tap at the door, and the individual who had added to Hooligan's alarm entered—a rough-looking man, with a lot of unkempt hair straggling over the greasy collar of a butcher's blue coat.

"Just popped down from Farringdon Market to have a chat about that 'ad' of yours, Mr. Parker," he wheezed. "There's my money for a subscription. Blind, are you? Sorry for that. I dote on a horse, I do." Suddenly his eyes rested on Nance, and drawing a deep breath he added: "Morning, Miss."

"Good morning," said Nance shortly, intent only on the completion of her stratagem. "I think, father," she added, "I will run out with this batch of letters if you will attend to the gentleman. It

would be a pity to miss a post, and I won't be two minutes."

Mr. Beauchamp bowed his stately head, only too glad to be left alone with any one with a weakness for horseflesh, and Nance passed out with the basket of letters, little thinking that she had practised no deception whatever on the nobleman at present crouching among the chimney-pots.

For the new subscriber in the butcher's blouse was none other than Inspector Croal, come to look up "the girl from Parker's Lightning Finals" on the spot, and more than a little astonished to find that his anonymous informant was right after all.

## CHAPTER XIII

### "SHADOWS IN BEAKER STREET"

INSPECTOR CROAL was a rapid reasoner, and, having recovered from the shock of finding that the beautiful Miss Beauchamp, whom he had met in the "best society" at Barfield, was engaged in sending out "snips" from a sordid room off Fleet Street, he at once assumed that Sir Charles Roylance was aware of the fact.

And the further question at once arose: Had Sir Charles any knowledge—above all, a guilty knowledge—of the crime in the gorse?

One thing was very certain. It would be worse than useless now to make a direct appeal for information to these people.

Having come to this decision, rather than run the risk of recognition by Nance, he cut short his visit and took his departure, after exchanging a few racing commonplaces with the blind prophet.

"Broken-down swells!" was his thoughtful comment as he crossed the landing under the skylight, beyond which another "broken-down swell" was cowering and listening, a sight of whom in that place by the detective would have altered the course of this story and made the difference between life and death to some.

Ah, Nance Beauchamp! Nance Beauchamp! You little thought when you practised your ruse for getting Lord Hooligan out of the way how far you went towards defeating your ends; and what a load of sorrow you would have saved yourself and others if you had waited till Croal's keen eyes had had a chance of connecting your father's brutal partner with the brutal "honeymooner" of the *Angler's Rest*!

She came tripping up the stairs with her empty basket, and found her father very pleased with himself.

"If that was really a detective he got nothing out of me about Hooligan," the old gentleman chuckled. "Much as I should like to see his lordship put to confusion, honour forbade my giving him away. But how did you come to know a policeman by sight, my child?"

"He—Inspector Croal—was pointed out to me the other day."

"I suppose he came to see if we are running our business honestly," said the former owner of Beauchamp Grange, proudly conscious of his integrity. "You had better call that cubbish scion of the peerage down, now that the bogy has gone away."

Nance assented, and, taking the chair to stand on, unfastened the skylight; but it was not till he had been trebly assured that there was no stranger in the office that Hooligan would descend. At last he swung himself on to the landing, haggard of eye and dishevelled as to his garments.

"Has—has the fellow gone?" he queried, shooting furtive glances at the door.

"I have said so three times already," replied Nance contemptuously. "I cannot tell, of course, whether he will return."

"Well, then, I'll be off for a drink, and I shan't

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campaign, but she did not know that Inspector Croal, in the garb of an elderly City man, and with his dogged jaws covered with a trimly clipped false beard, was seated on the roof of the 'bus that took them home.

To Mr. Croal's matured experience it was mere child's play to shepherd the girl and her father to the dreary thoroughfare. They got down at the corner of Beaker Street, and Nance was far too busy with her blind charge to observe the persistent "shadow" that followed them to Frank Bremner's door.

The inspector walked on to the end of the street, shouldering his umbrella with the air of a born City man, and then turned back with a sigh of satisfaction. The spirit of the chase was on him, and the chase had led him to within a few doors of the public-house which the murdered woman's brother had mentioned as his house of call. That was a combination that excited infinite surmise, and Mr. Croal bent his steps to the *Union Jack* with keen anticipation.

As he repassed Bremner's house Bremner himself came out and also made for the same destination, walking so fast that by the time Croal turned into the saloon bar he was already in conversation with Mr. Tidmarsh. Croal smiled inwardly as he saw the lawyer's clerk "palm" a slip of paper into the bookmaker's hand.

The detective planted himself as near as possible to Bremner and Tidmarsh in order to prove the efficacy of his disguise, and soon gathered, from the bookmaker's vacant stare, that he was not recognized. He could not, however, get quite close to the pair by reason of a young man who lounged at the counter between him and them.

Croal called for a whisky and soda, and while

sipping it, listened hard to what passed between Tidmarsh and the man who had come out of the house to which he had shadowed his quarry. But the talk was all about racing, and the inspector was on the point of making himself known to Tidmarsh when something caused him to stop. The young man next him had quietly touched Bremner on the shoulder.

"Hullo, Mr. Skinner! You in these parts again?" exclaimed the clerk, turning round. "I didn't know you out of livery."

"Got a night off," said the laconic groom. "Have something with me, sir."

Bremner accepted the invitation, and naturally began to talk with the man who was treating him. Croal, himself a pastmaster in the art of "pumping," soon saw that the smart young man was trying to steer the conversation to a certain subject, and he pricked his ears still further when he discovered that the subject was the girl in whom he himself was interested.

"Saw her the other day when you were driving, through the street, eh?" said Bremner drily. "Yes, she's a nice girl, and she and her father lodge with us. Not your sort and my sort, old man. Regular swell folk, but none too much cash. You don't mean to say you've gone and lost your heart to her on sight?"

"Something of the kind," Skinner admitted. "I was thinking, Mr. Bremner," he went on in his level, passionless lone, "that if you'd let me drop in as your friend of a Sunday afternoon I might run across her, perhaps."

"Then, my boy, you'd better get that notion out of your head sharp," said the shiftless clerk with unwonted decision. "You might as well cry for the moon. Firstly, you wouldn't have the ghost of a

chance with her, because she's a lady born. Secondly, you wouldn't see her if you did come to the house, because she's taken to going out of town on Sundays to visit some swells up the river. She went last week, and I hear from the missus that she's going next. And thirdly, Mr. Skinner, with all due respect, I ain't the chap to annoy a girl, lady or otherwise, by making my humble abode a medium for shoving strangers on to her."

"Oh, no offence," said Skinner. "I'm sorry I spoke." And, declining Bremner's invitation to "have another," he abruptly quitted the bar.

"This is a pretty deep undercurrent," Mr. Croal murmured to himself. "Who can that chap be, I wonder? He's on the same clue as myself—foxing after my slippery young lady, and there's precious little love at back of it, so far as he's concerned. If I'm not mistaken, he got all he wanted in that piece of news about the Sunday trips up the river, or he wouldn't have cleared out so quick. Never asked her name, either, so he must have known that already."

Mr. Croal finished his whisky, looked into the empty tumbler for inspiration, and frankly confessed to himself that he was in a fog. That was a state of mind that always galled him, for to do him justice it seldom happened. To put an end to it he held out his hand to the big man on the stool.

"Good-evening, Mr. Tidmarsh," he said.

Mr. Tidmarsh, not recognizing him, scrutinized his palm for a betting slip, and, not finding one, gazed at him blankly, while Bremner winked at the barmaid in amusement. Tidmarsh was regarded as something of a joke at the *Union Jack*.

"Lord, but you're well got up," murmured the bookmaker, as Croal went close and revealed himself in a whisper. "Found anything?"

"I've found this," the inspector replied, producing the blank sheet of notepaper which he had unearthed at the *Angler's Rest*. "Seen anything like it before?"

Tidmarsh's eyes lit up with swift wrath. "That lion!" he snarled. "Yes, I had a letter from her on paper like that—the time she was away in the country, you know."

"Did you notice the postmark?"

But Mr. Tidmarsh had not been so observant. As he pointed out, there had been "no call for such cuteness" then. He had thought that his sister was enjoying a happy honeymoon.

Resisting the bookmaker's importunate curiosity, Croal replaced the paper, and was about to fish for an introduction to Bremner, with a view to finding out who had been the young fellow who had evinced such an interest in his lodger, when a diversion occurred.

A dainty, flaxen-haired little maiden of some six summers, with a clean white pinafore over a threadbare black dress, peeped shyly into the bar, and catching sight of Bremner, came forward with greater confidence. At the moment the clerk was chatting to the barmaid, who drew his attention to the child.

"Hullo, poppet!" he cried, turning to the child. "Anything the matter?"

"Please, daddy, will you come home, mummy says. The man in podeshun has tummled in the fire and set alight to hisself."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MAN IN POSSESSION

THE little one delivered her message with a shrill distinctness that rang through the saloon bar, and Frank Bremner flushed for very shame. It was too true. On returning from work that afternoon he had been met on the doorstep by his weeping wife with the intelligence that there was a broker's man in the kitchen in respect of the last quarter's rent. With characteristic levity he had remarked that it would be all right, and had straightway gone round to the *Union Jack* to endeavour to right matters by investing some of his few remaining shillings with Tidmarsh.

But this exposure before his boon companions brought him up with a round turn. Even to the careless loungers of a saloon bar it does not look pretty to be drinking and trafficking with a bookmaker in an avowedly sporting house when the home is in danger of disruption ; and, his selfishness being more of the head than the heart, he acutely felt the implied rebuke of the glances shot at him.

However, the summons called for immediate attention, and, taking his little daughter's hand, he was making for the door when Croal accosted him, after whispering to Tidmarsh not to disclose his identity.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I couldn't help overhearing," said the inspector. "If there's been an accident I might be of service, and shall be most happy—mutual friend of Mr. Tidmarsh, Bayly by name. I've been through an ambulance class, and can render first aid if required."

"Come along then," replied Bremner, too perturbed to offer thanks. "It is only a few yards up the street."

On entering the house by the basement door they were confronted by a strong smell of burning and by groans from the kitchen, where they found Mary Bremner and Nance Beauchamp bending over a little wizened old man propped in an armchair. His singed coat had been removed, and lay on the table, emitting evil odours.

"He's getting better, I think," Mrs. Bremner informed her husband. "The poor old fellow says he was weak for want of food and fell as he was crossing the front of the hearth, setting fire to his clothes and burning his hand before I could help him."

It was an anxious moment for the inspector when Nance looked up from her ministrations to add indignantly:

"His employers must be perfect brutes. They only pay him ten shillings a week, and though they knew he was starving when they sent him here they wouldn't advance him sixpence to buy a meal."

But the disguise held good. In the ponderous, elderly City merchant there was no resemblance to the square-jowled, keen-eyed detective of the previous Sunday at Barfield-on-Thames. As a matter of fact, Nance thought the inspector was a surgeon.

"Allow me," he said, and kneeling by the chair he examined the burn, called for sweet oil and cotton wool, and soon made the patient comfortable.

Eased of his pain, the man in possession sat up feebly and looked from one to the other of the kindly faces round him with dog-like gratitude. He was very old—seventy-five at least—and a Hebrew of the Hebrews, or, as Croal said to himself, "about the Jewiest-looking Jew out of Whitechapel."

"May Heaven bless you all, who ought to be my enemies," he wheezed. "Hands that might well be raised against me have bound up and healed. And I cannot repay—I cannot repay! I, Moses Cohen, who have a son feasting on the fat of the land, sleeping in down, and driving in gaudy equipages, can offer naught but the grip of the law to those whom I would fain endow with all good things."

"All right, old chap; don't let the personal question worry you. Heaven knows it's no fault of yours that you're in charge of my sticks," said Bremner with bitter self-reproach, but adding in his whimsical way: "Perhaps that rich son of yours would lend us a bit to be going on with."

The little withered atomy in the chair thrust forward his beak-like nose and bared his yellow gums in contemptuous grimace. "My son help any one," he chuckled, as though the joke tickled him. "He might lend you money if you had fat bones to pick, broad acres to foreclose on, or a reversion under a will; and naked you would be as at birth when he had done with you. But to such as you his purse-strings would be shut. Me, his own father, he turned penniless into the street ten years since—because there was something he would have me do at which my soul revolted."

Exhausted by his tirade, he sank back in the chair, but Croal reassured them that there was no cause for alarm.

"I'll look after him for the present. You want to put the children to bed, and Mr. Beauchamp is

taking a nap and won't need me just yet," said Nance to Mrs. Bremner.

"They go by their own name here, anyhow," reflected Croal, adding aloud, "Well, the patient seems to be in good hands, and as I can't do any more for him I'll be off. By the by, Mr.—ah! Bremner, thank you—I thought I saw you talking at the *Union Jack* to a young fellow I know in the City—Deaken, of Highbury?"

"Oh, no," was the reply. "That was Skinner, groom to Leopold Tannadyce, the big West End moneylender. His governor is a client of our firm —that's how I know him."

Was it the pain of the burn that sent a sharp spasm across the parchment countenance of Moses Cohen at that moment? Nance thought so, and bent over him soothingly, murmuring words of comfort.

That was the picture which the inspector carried away in his mental vision—of a fair girl with a face full of womanly pity tending the aged and none too cleanly scarecrow whom chance had committed to her mercy.

"She isn't a bad sort, whatever her part in this little piece is," the detective told himself, as, having pooh-poohed Bremner's tardy thanks, he walked away up the street. "But Leopold Tannadyce's groom. Where does he come in? Or, by jingo, is it his master who's so curious about her Sundays out?"

## CHAPTER XV

### THE ELECTRIC LAUNCH

"NOW, Mr. Quintree, I know I shall not appeal to you in vain. I am making up my subscription list in aid of the Anti-Gambling League. What shall I book for you ? "

The speaker was that stern yet kindly spinster Lady Alice Mashiter, and the place where she put that pertinent question was the lawn of her pretty house, The Hollies, at Barfield. It was Sunday afternoon again, and she had had the tea-table brought out under the ancient cedar, where, in addition to the hostess were grouped in garden-chairs Mr. Quintree, Mr. Cooper-Bulstrode, a churchwarden and local magnate, Sir Charles Roylance, and Nance Beauchamp.

The reverend gentleman rubbed his fat hands together and purred gently : " A good cause, Lady Alice, a good cause. Yes, I must contribute my humble mite, and there's no time like the present for discharging these—er, charitable liabilities. A guinea is all I can afford, I fear ; but perhaps my sympathy, dear lady—my sympathy—may make it go further."

He plunged his hand into his waistcoat pocket and extracted some coins—also, unintentionally, a

printed paper which fell on the grass. Sir Charles, sitting a little behind him, picked it up and was about to restore it when his eye caught the heading, and with a smothered laugh and a boyish grin he transferred it to his own pocket.

"And you, Mr. Cooper-Bulstrode—I trust that you will follow Mr. Quintree's good example!" said the enthusiast, annexing the guinea.

Mr. Bulstrode, a portly gentleman with mutton-chop whiskers, was more flush of money than words. He produced a sheaf of five-pound notes, selected one, and handed it to his hostess with a sigh.

"It is useless, I know, to ask my nephew to assist in nailing down the coffin of his amusement," proceeded Lady Alice, glancing severely at Starlight's owner.

"On the contrary, my dear aunt, here is a nail for the coffin," said Sir Charles, passing her a sovereign. "And my sympathy is quite as much at your service as Mr. Quintree's, for if I win my next race I hope never to book another bet or face the flag again. Come, Miss Beauchamp, let's try the punt. I want to show you something—it's too funny for words," he added in a lower tone for Nance's sole benefit.

The lawn ran down to the river, where at the foot of a flight of wooden steps a punt and a pleasure skiff were moored. Helping his companion into the former, Sir Charles took the pole and punted a little way out into the stream. Having made the craft fast to the pole, he came and sat beside Nance on the cushions at the stern.

"We can talk here without being overheard, and now for my promised revelation and an examination of my plunder," he began. "What do you think? Old Quintree, who has just given a guinea to the Anti-Gambling League, subscribes to a tipping office,

if you know what that is—a shop where they sell racing lies to fools."

"Really!" was all poor Nance could falter.

"Yes—at any rate he carries a tipster's circular about with him, and dropped it just now on the lawn," the baronet rattled on. "Here it is—headed 'Parker's Lightning Finals,' save the mark! Now let's see what 'real good thing' Mr. Parker has been putting the reverend sport and gay old deceiver on to. By Jove! but this is too bad. I wonder if it accounts for it."

"Accounts for what?" Nance hazarded eagerly, but in a thin voice which he was too much absorbed to notice or even to hear. He read on without answering, his brows contracted in a deepening frown and his mouth twitching with nervous excitement.

"Of all miserable lying concoctions this is the worst," he exclaimed at last, and put into Nance's hand the circular which she herself had drawn up, announcing Starlight's imaginary breakdown with a view to defeating the machinations of Hooligan.

"Of course this is—is not true," she murmured, after glancing at the circular. "Starlight is well and likely to win?"

"As fit as a fiddle and good enough to win me back Roylance Abbey," replied Sir Charles confidently. "But in one respect the colt is a regular bag of mystery. First he was rushed to a short price quite unaccountably, and now for the past few days he has been declining in the betting, till yesterday I was able to back him at quite a respectable figure, to win a big stake. Owing to this false rumour, probably. It isn't altogether pleasant, though, to feel that one owes one's luck to such lying stuff as that."

"Perhaps you owed your original bad luck to

equally false or, at least, ill-intentioned reports," Nance answered, fighting back the hot tears that rose to her eyes.

She was paying a bitter penalty for serving the man she loved. All that week, since Hooligan's retreat through the skylight, life had been easier for her. The brutal nobleman who had duped her blind and sanguine father had not been near the office again. She had had matters all her own way, freely substituting her own letters of advice for Hooligan's, and she had come down to Barfield hoping to hear that "Charley" had fully profited by her sacrifice of self-respect. But not like this, in words of scathing contumely.

"Very likely," Sir Charles replied after a pause. "There is one man to whose interest it would be to spread reports that would prevent my having a good win—the plausible scoundrel who holds the mortgages. He is quite capable of suborning some pettifogging affair like this 'Parker's Lightning Finals' to spoil my market."

"Charley, what is this man's name? Is it possible that he is known to me?" Nance asked suddenly. She half expected that he would mention Lord Hooligan, not being aware that his lordship possessed little but the clothes he stood up in.

On what slender threads do great issues hang. Before Sir Charles could speak the name of Leopold Tannadyce, which was on his lips, his attention was distracted by an electric launch which had rounded a bend in the river two hundred yards away, and was swooping towards them at a tremendous speed. He had observed the same launch several times during the afternoon, and had been struck by the erratic steering of the helmsman as it passed and repassed The Hollies. It was a handsome vessel of considerable size, with a range of deckhouses capable of

accommodating a number of persons, but on this occasion there seemed to be hardly any one on board.

Sir Charles rose with an exclamation of annoyance, and began rapidly untying the punt-pole.

"I don't like the look of that machine," he explained. "The fellow who's steering her must be either drunk or incapable or both—she's wobbling all the over the river. We shall be safer nearer the bank."

He succeeded in unfastening the knot, but, experiencing some difficulty in drawing the pole from the muddy bottom, he cast an anxious glance up stream. To his horror he saw that the launch had ceased her devious course, and was rushing straight for the punt, in the weird fashion of electric craft, making no sound but the tinkling ripple from her cutwater.

Sir Charles shouted a warning cry to the oncoming vessel, but it had no effect except to alarm Lady Alice and her guests, who came running down the lawn just as the launch crashed into the punt, sinking her and throwing her occupants into the river.

The launch had slowed somewhat just before the impact, and, handled now with a skill in strange contrast to the previous recklessness, came to a stop within her own length. Two men jumped into a boat that had been towing astern, and quickly reaching Nance as she rose to the surface for the first time, put her on board the launch, while Sir Charles, seeing that she was rescued, struck out for land.

Clambering up the steps, he stood, a dripping figure, on the bank, gazing at the launch, which, to his amazement, was beginning to move down stream.

"Here, where are you going to? Why don't you land the lady?" he cried, consumed with anxiety about Nance.

In response to his shout there appeared at the stern of the launch, clad in a straw hat and immaculate boating flannels, Mr. Leopold Tannadyce.

"Oh, is that you, Sir Charles Roylance?" came the moneylender's answering shout. "Pray accept my regrets for the clumsiness of my steersman, but be under no misapprehension about the welfare of the lady. She happens to be a particular friend of mine. You don't seem to have a landing stage there, so I'll run down to the *Angler's Rest*, where she can go ashore—*if she chooses*."

With which he turned away, and there rang out across the water his sharp order to the engineer:

"Full speed ahead!"

Lady Alice and Mr. Quintree did not understand the look of amazement and fury that the young baronet flung after the retreating launch, though, strangely enough, the staid churchwarden, Mr. Cooper-Bulstrode, nodded and grunted to himself as though appreciating the situation.

"What is the matter, Charles?" Lady Alice asked. "The man couldn't do more than apologise for running you down, and as he is a friend of Miss Beauchamp, he will doubtless do all that is possible to make her comfortable."

"It is his statement that he *is* her friend, Aunt Alice, that disquiets me," said Sir Charles, moving off towards a gate in the garden hedge. "Don't stop me! I must run down to the *Angler's Rest* and bring her back, for of course she will elect to land."

"At least tell me who the man is," exclaimed Lady Alice, stiffening visibly. To find that a young lady to whom one has been playing the hostess has undesirable acquaintances is disturbing to spinsterial equanimity.

"He is a Jew moneylender without principles or character—the shark who holds the Roylance mort-

gages," Sir Charles flung back over his shoulder. And while Mr. Quintree rolled up his eyes in horror, and Mr. Cooper-Bulstrode vaguely consoled Lady Alice that "it wasn't any worse," he sped down the lane and rushed all dripping into the inn.

There only bad news awaited him. Mrs. Timmins, the stout landlady, met him in the passage, and, in answer to his eager questions, informed him that the electric launch had just passed, going at top speed Londonwards, without touching at the *Angler's Rest* landing stage.

Racked with the gravest misgivings, he made his way back, not to the Hollies, but to the furnished cottage which he had rented for the summer, and began to change his wet garments with feverish haste.

"Heaven help me!" he murmured. "She must have been badly hurt in the collision. I cannot and will not believe that she deliberately chose to remain on the launch with a scoundrel whose reputation would besmirch any woman's fair name. Yet there was a taunt in that '*if she chooses*' of his which must have some meaning."

He sent his man to Lady Alice with a message that he had gone to London, and ten minutes after entering the cottage quitted it again for the railway station.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE CLUB

WHEN Nance Beauchamp was hoisted, more than half-drowned, on board the launch, she was carried into the sumptuously furnished saloon and laid by Tannadyce's orders on a couch, regardless of damage to the upholstery from her streaming clothes.

She was not quite conscious when they brought her in, and Tannadyce's first act, after his conversation from the deck with Sir Charles on the bank, was to detach from her grasp the circular of "Parker's Lightning Finals" which she had held in her hand at the time of the collision.

As he mastered the contents of the sodden paper, which were in direct opposition to the advice which he had believed was being sent out under Hooligan's supervision, he frowned slightly, but, pocketing the circular, turned his attention to administering restoratives.

Nance soon opened her eyes, and, not being much the worse for her immersion, gazed up in astonishment at the man whom she recognized at once as her rescuer from the cupboard at the office on the day of Hooligan's outrageous conduct. Naturally the sight inspired her with confidence. He had behaved with

such perfect correctness on that occasion that she felt no alarm at not having been put ashore.

A glib explanation for that omission was ready. "Ah, I rejoice that you are not really hurt," said Tannadyce softly. "I am sure I did right in not landing you in an unconscious condition among strangers in a village where there would be no medical aid. We shall be at Kingston in no time, where you can receive attention if you require it."

"I am all right, but what do you mean by strangers?" Nance exclaimed. "I was staying for the day with the lady off whose lawn you sank us."

"Dear me! I had no idea—thought you were pleasuring on the river in the usual way, especially as the gentleman who was with you on reaching the shore shouted that I was to take care of you," lied Tannadyce. And then with an affected start he added: "Why, surely it is Miss—Miss Parker, the young lady whom I was so fortunate as to serve the other day."

Considering that the disaster to the punt had been deliberately planned and brought about by Tannadyce for his own ends, and that he had been well aware of the identity of the occupants, he may be credited with having crammed a fair amount of falsehood into one sentence. But his future action all depended on whether Nance had confessed her connection with the tipping office to Sir Charles, and he was inclined to fear that she had. From the fact of the circular having been clenched in her hand, it looked as though the matter had been under discussion at the time of the "accident." He must discover if that were so before committing himself to a definite course.

So, when Nance rather shamefacedly admitted her identity with the heroine of the Red Lion Court episode, he said at once: "Perhaps, after all, it will

be best if I have the launch turned round and take you back to your friends. I should like to be introduced to them, and apologize for running you down, though perhaps they will pardon me on the strength of having liberated you the other day."

Nance shuddered so visibly at the proposal that without a word she told him all he wanted to know. The bare idea of Lady Alice and Sir Charles being informed in her presence of what this man had done for her, and where, filled her with a shrinking dread, all too eloquent of a secret still to be guarded.

"I—I don't think I will trouble you," she faltered nervously. "If I could only have my clothes dried I would prefer to go home to town."

Tannadyce sprang up with alacrity, a smile of triumph curling the corners of his cruel mouth. "How stupid of me not to have thought of it before!" he cried. "There are plenty of dry things on board. My sister often accompanies me on these trips, and I expect you will find a complete change of garments in her cabin. Pray make use of everything you need. It is the only reparation I can make for this untoward occurrence."

Nance thanked him with real gratitude, for as she got over her shock, her bedraggled plight and the discomfort of being drenched to the skin were beginning to weigh upon her. If she caught cold and were laid up, she would be useless for fighting Charley's battles during the next few critical days. She entered the cabin to which Tannadyce conducted her, and, having locked the door, proceeded to investigate the wardrobe of her unknown host's mythical "sister."

If the accident could have been foreseen, she told herself, a better provision could not have been made for her requirements. The nameless lady must have been just of her height and figure. The clothes were much smarter than she had been in the habit of

wearing in the days of her poverty, and the hat, hanging on a peg of the mirror, was a dream of Parisian millinery. Everything fitted her, too, like wax —even to the lingerie and dainty boots.

If she had not been in such straits for dry things she might have been puzzled by the fact that the garments all had the appearance of being brand-new; but that was a detail she was not disposed to quarrel with, seeing that she had no choice but to use them. It never crossed her mind that the elegant articles of attire had been specially selected by Tannadyce in Regent Street the day before.

Nothing could enhance the beauty of the girl's face, but when she stepped out into the saloon the transformation in her general appearance was so striking that Tannadyce with difficulty restrained his admiration. He had hardly looked for a radiant vision so ravishing to the senses, but it was not his cue as yet to play the open lover to a woman who was so much a pawn in his game that half an hour before he had callously taken the risk of drowning or maiming her. For the present he had to avoid all suspicion of any but the most benevolent motives.

"Ah, you have managed to pick out some useful odds and ends," he remarked with affected carelessness. "And now, as the launch cannot go further down the river than Kingston, and we are just coming to the landing-place, perhaps you will tolerate my escort to the railway station. There should be a London train nearly due."

Nance thanked him and consented, thinking it no harm to accept civilities from a gentleman of such irreproachable behaviour. She did, however, say with something of her old naïveté that she ought not to be wandering about with a stranger whose name she did not know.

"That is easily rectified," was the reply, and

Tannadyce introduced himself correctly, though watching her with furtive anxiety while he mentioned his name. He was relieved to see that it conveyed nothing to her, though he did not guess by what a narrow margin he had escaped. Had the punt been upset a minute later Sir Charles would have answered her question, and she would have now received the name of Tannadyce with loathing and disgust.

"And will you not return the compliment?" he said in his most insinuating tone. "Pray correct me if I am rude, but I have an impression that Parker may be a name assumed for business purposes."

"It is a name I hate, and hope soon never to hear again," she returned hotly. "My name is Beauchamp."

"Oh, indeed! the Beauchamps of Berkshire. I remember your telling me that you came from that county," said Tannadyce, with the air of having made a discovery.

He had changed his boating flannels for a frock-coat and top hat, so when they reached the station Nance was not surprised to find that he also was going to London by train. Nor when he informed her of the fact, and asked if he might travel with her, could she very well refuse—especially as there were only two vacant seats in the compartment full of noisy folk returning from a Sunday on the river.

Tannadyce made good use of his time on the journey, avoiding all semblance of personal homage or interest, abstaining even from alluding to Nance's companion in the punt, but talking with the clever adaptability of a man who has made a congenial acquaintance which he hopes to cultivate with ulterior motives. By the time the train slowed down for Waterloo, Nance was inclined to regard him as a semi-paternal benefactor who had assisted her in a

very unpleasant predicament, and atoned for an accident, for which he was not culpably responsible, by every means in his power.

"You will be going home now, and my pleasant duty must come to an end," he said, as he helped her on to the platform. "Unless, by the way, you would like to exchange that costume for your own, which I had placed in the guard's van," he added, as though it were an afterthought. "We should probably find my sister at our flat in Regent Street, and she would be delighted to make your acquaintance while your own things are being dried."

No one likes wearing other people's clothes, and a natural inclination to get rid at the earliest opportunity of borrowed plumes was the sole reason why Nance hesitated. But she who hesitates is lost, and it needed but a little more persuasion to lure her into the trap.

"Then we will take a cab," said Tannadyce, having won her tardy assent, and, having sent a porter to fetch the parcel of wet garments from the van, he set about selecting a hansom. But he did it in leisurely fashion, with an eye all the time on the opposite platform, into which a train from the loop line on which Barfield was situated presently steamed. Not till the passengers from this train were crowding out through the barriers did he make his final choice of a vehicle, and even then took time in settling Nance comfortably into it before leaping in after her and giving the address to the driver across the roof.

So it was that Sir Charles Roylance, hurrying towards the cab rank with a vague idea of going to Beaker Street to discover if Nance had returned safely, saw her driving off with Tannadyce—exactly as Tannadyce had intended he should. Not only that, but she was dressed in a style that would have seemed a little too smart for the lawn at Ascot, and

she appeared to be on friendly terms with the money-lender who held his ancient possessions in a grip of steel.

In a whirlwind of doubt and jealous fear, Sir Charles sprang into another cab and bade the driver follow the first to its destination.

"Don't let them know that they are being followed if you can help it," he shouted through the flap as they jingled down the station approach.

"They know it already, sir, I expect," replied the cabman. "The gentleman has just looked round at us."

Sir Charles sank back on the seat and folded his arms grimly. He would have spared Nance the pain of knowing that he was prying into her actions, only holding himself at her service if she had need of him. But now he would have to face her just indignation, and look foolish if Tannadyce drove her quietly to her lodgings and left her there. And a thousand times, he told himself, would he prefer to look foolish over such an uneventful issue rather than have to protect her from graver consequences of such an ill-omened association.

After crossing Waterloo Bridge the first cab turned westward along the Strand, increasing the pursuer's forebodings, for the direct route to Islington would have been up Wellington Street. And Sir Charles knew, to his cost, that the great West End money-lender lived as a bachelor over his offices at the foot of Regent Street. The idea of Nance Beauchamp being taken there, wittingly or otherwise, would not bear thinking of.

But the great glass portals of the temple of usury were passed without a stoppage, and Sir Charles began to breathe more freely. The driver of the other cab might be taking a more westerly route to the northern suburb for reasons of his own, and all

might yet be well. But he had no sooner comforted himself with this assurance than his own driver raised the flap and called down—

"Keb's stopped, sir—Razzle Dazzle Club, sir. Lady and gent getting out. Shall I put you down?"

Sir Charles was out in an instant, tossed the man a generous fare, and raced up the pavement, but reached the door into which Tannadyce had conducted Nance a moment too late. He followed into a broad, luxuriously carpeted hall, only to find his way blocked by two stalwart attendants in gorgeous liveries, as a baize door at the end swung to.

"Are you a member of the club, sir?" said one of the men respectfully, but with a note of authority in his voice.

"No," exclaimed Sir Charles, "but there's a lady gone in whom I must speak to for a moment." He made as though to push past the janitors, but they blocked his way more firmly.

"Very sorry, sir, but you mustn't do that," said the senior man. "Our orders are very strict only to admit members and their friends. We shall have to put you out if you try to force an entrance."

Recognizing the futility of resistance, the baronet went out into the street, trembling like a frightened child.

As a man of the world, he was aware that the Razzle Dazzle Club was the most notorious of all the metropolitan haunts of fast men and women.

"What, Sir Charles Roylance!" said a voice at his elbow. "Surely you don't belong to that show?"

"I should think not!" he returned indignantly, as he faced about and met the keen grey eyes of Inspector Croal. "I—I thought I saw a friend go in—that was all. I can't stop. I'm in a hurry."

The detective looked thoughtfully after the receding figure. The young man's agonised face and

shaking limbs had told him something that he had much wished to learn.

"There's no collusion between Sir Charles and the lady then," he murmured softly to himself. "It remains to be proved whether there is between her and Mr. Leopold Tannadyce."

For he, too, had seen the cab drive up and its occupants enter what he mentally described as "the hottest crib in London."

And Mr. Croal continued to dawdle aimlessly about the street.

## CHAPTER XVII

### MOSES COHEN'S CURSE

IN Beaker Street that same Sunday evening saw some slight alteration in the habits of the Bremner family. It had been Frank Bremner's custom to slip down to the *Union Jack* as soon as that sporting hostelry opened its doors at six o'clock. But to-night he did not feel equal to showing his face there, and had not, in fact, done so since his little daughter Madge had proclaimed to the customers that there was "a man in possession."

For Mr. Moses Cohen still sat in the kitchen, in default of payment of the debt for which he was installed—seven pounds ten shillings, in respect of a quarter's rent. The old man had got over his fall into the fire, and did his best to repay the kindness shown him by performing odd jobs—filling coal scuttles, cleaning knives, and the like—and was an entirely peaceable and friendly inmate, devoted to poor careworn Mary Bremner and to "the pretty Miss," as he called Nance, who had shown him such unexpected sympathy.

For all that, Bremner would, of course, have been only too glad to have seen the back of him, if he could have laid his hand upon the amount necessary to pay the debt. But that was just what he could

not do. He had already forestalled his next month's salary, and luck had been dead against him in the last bets he had made with Tidmarsh before his exposure at the *Union Jack*. To do him justice he had not made a bet since that disconcerting event had brought his selfishness forcibly home to him.

The children had been put to bed, and husband and wife were in the basement sitting-room, sadly discussing ways and means—or, rather, the lack of them—when the parlour bell rang.

"There's Mr. Beauchamp," Mrs. Bremner exclaimed, rising quickly; "I wonder what he wants, for it isn't ten minutes since I left him? He has been so strange in his manner to me all day, seeming as if he was on the point of saying something and then pulling himself up."

"Going to give us notice that he'll leave the rooms," said Bremner gloomily. "That would be the last straw."

Mrs. Bremner went wearily, but willingly enough, upstairs, and found Mr. Beauchamp sitting in the dusk by the open window, where he could enjoy the noises of the street. The old gentleman had been heartily glad for Nance to take what he called her "Sundays out," hardly realizing that she was meeting Sir Charles Roylance, whose horse he thought he was "booming" on weekdays—all in the way of business. He had been so accustomed in the old days to mix with persons of quality that it seemed quite natural for his daughter to visit Lady Alice Mashiter. He little thought how bound up were those visits with the business of "Parker's Lightning Finals," which on Sundays he did his best to forget.

It was, therefore, with something of the manner of the old country squire, courtly, yet genial, that he received his harrassed landlady.

"I am sorry to trouble you so soon again, Mrs. Bremner," he said, turning his sightless eyes towards her, "but I've been all day making up my mind about something. My daughter wanted me to do it, but I've had to figure out whether I could afford it, and so far as a blind old man can go to work, without pencil and paper, you know, I find that I can. Will you take this ten-pound note and pay out the person who, I understand, is inconveniencing you?"

Mary Bremner burst into tears. "Oh, sir, are you quite sure you can manage it—how good of you and Miss Beauchamp!" she cried incoherently. "If it hadn't been for my husband being fond of a bet we shouldn't have been in this trouble, but I hope he'll give it up now."

"Eh, what—give it up?" said the old gentleman, with some show of irritation. "There's no harm in betting if you back the right horse. Tell Bremner to back Starlight for the New Century Handicap if he wants to pay me that money soon, for it's only a loan, mind. We're poor folk ourselves, and when *my* man in possession got in he stayed there. There, no more thanks. Nance will be in presently, and I ought to have done this hours ago."

Mary Bremner ran downstairs three at a time and burst in upon her husband with the news of their lodger's generosity. The lawyer's clerk was greatly touched and comforted by it, and not a little surprised by the advice to back Starlight, which, perhaps rather unwisely, his wife passed on to him.

"And no bad judge either, though I shouldn't have credited him with a knowledge of racing," said Bremner. "It would be base ingratitude not to take his tip."

Going to the kitchen he roused the man in possession, who slumbered peacefully in a chair before

the fire. "Now, Mr. Cohen, the best of friends must part," he said. "A good fairy having lent me the little bit you're in for, please give me a receipt for the amount and costs, and make your fond adieus."

Moses Cohen raised his piteous old face and expressed pleasure at the termination of the trouble, but a moment later, to Bremner's surprise, began to weep.

"It is that I must go without again seeing the pretty Miss who was so good to me," he explained. "She has not returned from the country?"

"Not yet, but she only went for the day, and won't be long, I expect," replied Bremner. "Anyhow, don't worry about it," he added good-naturedly "You shall stay till to-morrow morning, and make your exit in proper style. She'd be sorry not to say good-bye to you, and we owe her any little pleasure we can give her, for, between you and me, it was she and her father who, poor as they are, pulled me out of this hole—God bless them."

"It is the poor who help the poor," the old man said solemnly, and he was beginning to pour out gratitude for the permission to stay when the area bell rang, and Bremner left him to answer it. He found the doorway filled by the huge form of Tidmarsh, who proceeded to apologise for the lateness of his call and to refer mysteriously to "business."

"I've paid you all I owe," said Bremner in perplexity.

"Honour bright you have," Billy responded. "It ain't racin' biz; it's private."

"Come in then," said Bremner, wondering how his wife would receive a visitor whom she had no cause to love, and who had never been to their house before. However, Mary Bremner's gentle soul was slow to harbour resentment—less than ever this

evening, when such timely help had come to them—and she welcomed the large bookmaker civilly enough.

Mr. Tidmarsh seemed shy of his subject, and hemmed and hawed a good deal before finally blurting out, with a nod at the kitchen door—

"I've come to put that chap out. No, I ain't drunk," he went on, noting Bremner's half-angry amazement, "but I've had a goodish bit off you, Frank, besides which I ain't got many friends among those I lay the odds to. You're about the only one, in fact, and—well, how much is he in for? I'll pay it if it's in reason."

The tears rose to Mary Bremner's eyes for the second time that night. "Surely it's true that there's good in every one—if you can only find it," she cried, her husband's laugh and Tidmarsh's puzzled look at the doubtful compliment setting them all at their ease.

"You're a good sort, old man, but another good sort has beaten you by a short head," Bremner replied; and he explained how their kindly lodgers had come to their assistance, mentioning also Mr. Beauchamp's curious advice to back Starlight.

Mr. Tidmarsh put back his greasy pocket-book with a sigh, possibly of relief, for though large of person he was only a "little man" financially. "That's funny about Starlight," he said. "The colt's up and down in the market like a pea on a drum. I reckon the old gent's only got it out of some paper—he can't know anything."

"Anyhow, I'm going to back the horse for a pound and chance it," said Bremner. "I owe it to my benefactor to respect his judgment, even if I have to keep on owing him the other thing."

"Oh, Frank, I had hoped you were going to give it up," Mrs. Bremner exclaimed, with a shy look at

the massive bookmaker who got his living out of the traffic she discountenanced.

"So I shall when Starlight has romped home in front of his field and I have paid the Beauchamps back," Bremner replied.

Tidmarsh stood ruminating during this interchange of marital amenities, apparently calculating the value of the carpet. Now he raised his great goggle eyes and looked from one to the other with an expansive smile of triumph.

"I can be in this after all," he said. "Frank shan't bet any more, ma'am. He shall chuck it as you wish, for it's a fool's game. But just as an old pal I'll put him on a tenner to nothing about Starlight, so he shall have his little flutter without having to pay for it if it don't come off. It won't make any difference to me, because I shall arrange the book according, and—— "

He paused abruptly, for the swift trot of a horse had stopped at the house and voices were heard at the front door.

"That's Miss Beauchamp," exclaimed Mrs. Bremner. "It isn't often she comes home in a cab—still less brings a friend."

"Well, good-night, as it is too late for me to have the pleasure of calling on Mr. Beauchamp," a man's penetrating tones floated through the open window. "I must repeat my regrets for the chapter of accidents which has marred an otherwise delightful afternoon."

The words were scarcely spoken when Moses Cohen came shuffling along the passage from the kitchen and, making weird animal noises, ran out of the area door and up the steps to the pavement. Thinking he was ill the Bremners followed, while Tidmarsh stood at the open door. A smart private hansom had drawn to the kerb, and close to it Mr. Leopold

Tannadyce was taking leave of Nance Beauchamp.

She had already inserted her latchkey in the door, when the aged broker's man came mouthing up the area steps and planted himself in front of the tall, rock-coated, shiny-hatted moneylender.

"Pretty Miss! Pretty Miss! Do you know who this fine gentleman is with the fine clothes and the private cab and the fat cheque-book?" he croaked, turning to Nance. "It is sad to find one so tender-hearted in company of this cruel son of mine, whom I begat to be a thorn in my side, to rob me, and to turn me into the streets in the day of my infirmity. May heaven set its mark against you and doom you to everlasting torment, Levi Cohen."

At that moment an involuntary exclamation escaped Nance, who had listened to the old man's diatribe with consternation. But now a new emotion seized her as her eyes travelled past the group on the pavement to the vehicle that had brought her. On entering she had paid no attention to it, but the full glare of a street lamp falling on the groom's livery and on the silver harness called up a pregnant reminiscence.

"The cab!" she cried, pointing a shaking finger and all ignorant that she spoke aloud. "Oh, what have I done? That is the cab that was by the grand stand on the morning of Starlight's trial."

At which Mr. Tidmarsh began to mount the area steps, but before he reached the top Nance had opened the front door and let herself in.

Tannadyce did not deign to reply to the tirade of the old man who claimed to be his father, but sprang with an impassive face into the cab, giving the curt order, "Home, Skinner," to the driver.

The group on the pavement looked in silence after the retreating vehicle till it turned the corner into Upper Street. Then Tidmarsh broke the

spell by laying a hand on Moses Cohen's shoulders.

"So that is your son," he said. "I know a lot of West Enders by sight, and he looks uncommonly like Leo Tannadyce, the nob's moneylender. Is that so?"

"To my shame, yes," the old man replied, and he crept down the steps again and back into the house.

"Well, good-night, Mrs. Bremner. Good-night, Frank. The Starlight tenner holds good, mind," said the bookmaker abruptly, and he walked rapidly away towards his own house higher up the street, leaving the Bremners overcome by the events of the last few minutes.

"To think that Miss Beauchamp should come home with a man like that," Mrs. Bremner exclaimed, when they got back to their room. "And did you notice her clothes, Frank?—not those she went out in this morning, and hardly respectable. That poor old creature's son, too."

Bremner could only vent a brimming mixture of surmise and conjecture in the trite remark that "it was a rum go." He was no less concerned about their generous young benefactor's association with the notorious Tannadyce, but he was deeply moved by matters that had no meaning for his wife. Nance's strange utterance about the cab, as well as its instant effect on Tidmarsh, had been grasped at once by the keen-witted lawyer's clerk, while Skinner's supposed amatory excursion into the wilds of Beaker Street assumed a new and graver significance.

The murder of Tidmarsh's sister on Epsom Downs was lurking somewhere in the background of the events of the evening—of that he was certain. His training from boyhood in an office like Nathan's, the solicitors, convinced him of it; but he was fairly bewildered by the plunging of his own modest house-

hold into the heart of such a tangled mystery. He was conscious, too, of the necessity of acting warily, since one who might turn out to be a principal player in the drama was a client of his firm.

"I'm going to smoke a pipe with Moses in the kitchen," he said. "Perhaps the old boy will be communicative about that son of his."

He sat up so late with the man in possession that when he returned to the sitting-room, his wife was on the point of going to bed. On the table stood a large dress box, to which she drew his attention.

"We are to get Tannadyce's address from a directory, or from Mr. Cohen, and send that off to him first thing in the morning. Miss Beauchamp met with an accident on the river, and had to borrow some clothes, which explains everything," said good Mary Bremner, with confidence.

"Oh, does it?" murmured Bremner feebly.

"And she particularly wants to see Cohen before he goes in the morning. The dear girl is so glad that we kept him here to-night."

"Ah, I can understand that," responded Bremner more briskly.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A WHIPPED CUR

AN observance of the Sabbath was not among Lord Hooligan's characteristics. An hour after Tannadyce's departure from Islington his lordship was entertaining a few friends at his rooms, and neither host nor guests were particularly sober. The latter consisted of one Markham a dissipated sporting hanger-on, and two ex-pugilists, known respectively as Ted the Pounder and Birmingham Jem, who had ended their public careers as exponents of the "noble art" through a too staunch devotion to the wine-cup, and now earned a precarious living as "minders" to bookmakers on the more rowdy racecourses.

Not one of the three would have picked Hooligan out of the gutter, except perhaps to go through his pockets; but the curious fascination which a title, however ignobly worn, has for some people attracted them to him, and they would have indignantly resented any denial that they were his friends. Just now an additional incentive to intimacy with his lordship was the cash which he was drawing from Tannadyce to bolster up the tipping office, and which enabled him to put up drinks with unwonted freedom.

This was the kind of society that Hooligan was really at home in. Just as we introduce them the conversation of these choice spirits received a check by the loud ringing of the house-bell.

A moment later Tannadyce stood in the doorway of the room, surveying the flushed faces of the occupants, the paraphernalia of drink, and, above all, the giver of the symposium with cold contempt.

"I want a word with you, Hooligan," he said, in an incisive tone that his satellite knew too well. It was a danger signal—a sign that the lion was in ill-humour, and had a rod in pickle for his jackal. But the latter, though quite understanding what was required of him, had had just enough drink to make him rebellious.

"Speak out, then," he blustered coarsely. "And don't stand staring there like a cow. Come in and sit down and help yourself to Hennessy or Johnny Walker. Let me introduce——"

Tannadyce cut him short with an imperious gesture. "Will you kindly ask these persons to retire?" he said in the same acid voice. "My business with you is both urgent and private, and so long as I pay you for your services, I intend to have them."

The demand was followed by intense silence in the room, broken only by the heavy breathing of the two ex-pugilists, who kept their eyes on their friend, as though awaiting orders. The principals in the wordy combat scanned each other, the one with sullen scowls, the other with the quiet magnetism that controls. But Hooligan was too far gone to feel the influence that had so often brought him to heel, and a hysterical giggle from the semi-drunken scribbler roused him to fury.

"I'll see you hanged before you order me about," he roared. "Here, Pounder, and you Jem, chuck

that chap into the street. I've stood enough of his impudence—me a peer, too—and I won't have it any longer. Sling him out, confound you."

The two ruffians lurched heavily up to obey the order if the intended victim gave them the chance, for they fully expected him to turn tail and bolt for safety. What, then, was their surprise when he met their onslaught with a hand rapidly extended after a plunge into his breast pocket, causing them to fall back a pace, thinking that he had produced a pistol.

Tannadyce smiled serenely and fluttered two bank-notes in their shrinking faces.

"I am sorry to disconcert your prowess, gentlemen; but the weapons which I hold are nothing more dangerous than a couple of five-pound notes," he said. "I have every confidence in their efficacy, however. Will you do me the favour to accept one each, and in return render me a slight service."

The Pounder and Birmingham Jem exchanged glances, and remarked simultaneously that they would do a good many things for a couple of flimsies.

"Then," Tannadyce coolly proceeded, "take that thing away from Lord Hooligan before he hurts himself, and tie him down to one of the chairs so that I can have a little quiet conversation with him."

For at the first sign of the defection of his pals, Hooligan had seized a cutlass that hung on the wall, mad with rage. In a twinkling the ex-pugilists had grabbed the rusty ornament and pinioned his lordship's arms; a minute later they had him securely trussed up in a large armchair, using the curtain girdles as ropes.

"Shall we gag him, Mister? He might holler for the police," panted Jem of Birmingham.

"No, he won't do that. The police are the last people he wants to see," sneered Tannadyce. "Now

you three clear out and wait outside in the street. I won't keep you long, and when I come out you shall have your compensation for, I fear, losing your noble friend."

The trio of scamps obediently vanished, Tannadyce faced his parasite—reduced now to blubbering impotence.

"What I wished to speak to you about was the business of 'Parker's Lightning Finals,'" he began as though nothing had happened. "You are aware, of course, that Starlight has receded in the betting during the last week, so that the purpose for which I acquired an interest in the tipping office has probably been defeated."

"I saw that the colt had been knocked out to 10 to 1," Hooligan admitted sullenly.

"Can you account for it in any way?"

"Not me."

"You have been at Red Lion Court every day, and kept a strict watch to see that only favourable advices about Roylance's colt were sent out?"

"Certainly I have," replied Hooligan, but with a trace of uneasiness now.

"Bah! Why do I waste time in proving you an unmitigated liar?" Tannadyce flashed upon him contemptuously. "How do you account for *that*?" And he held before his scowling captive the circular of Nance's concoction which he had detached from her unconscious clutch on the launch.

Lord Hooligan turned purple. "The girl must have got it printed and sent out unknown to me," he stammered.

"Yes, because you gave her every chance to do so by not going to the office since Tuesday," Tannadyce continued in a white heat. "It's no use your denying it. I happened to come across the girl to-day—it doesn't matter to you when or how—

and I got it out of her that what I charge you with is correct."

Hooligan's bullet head sank lower, but his bloodshot eyes peered furtively up at his angry patron. "I couldn't go there again. I had a bad scare—Croal," he snarled.

"So you allowed my affairs to go by the board," said Tannadyce, somewhat mollified by the admission. "I begin to think, my Lord Hooligan, that your value to me has become considerably discounted of late. I know your secret, but that doesn't concern me except so far as it incapacitates you. In the first place, you drink too hard to fulfil my principal requirement of picking up young men about town who want to borrow money; and secondly, how can I employ an agent who deserts me at a pinch through fear of a detective's hand on his shoulder?"

"You tried me too high, Tann," Hooligan whimpered. "How was I to know when I took on the job that there was to be a mix-up between that blind old fool's show and—and——"

"Inspector Croal's case," Tannadyce helped him out. "Well, you can make your mind easy about this office, for I'm going to drop that game. The girl has effectually knocked the bottom out of it, and I have no doubt that Roylance has backed his colt to win a big stake. I have another and a surer project on foot, but I no not know yet whether I shall require your co-operation. If I do, Hooligan, and you fail me again, you will have to look out for Inspector Croal. I very nearly put him on to you to-night."

He turned away and was leaving the room, when the trussed peer called him back with the whine: "I say, Tann, loose me yourself, there's a good chap. I'll be quiet enough with you, but there'd

be murder if you were to send those chaps back to me."

Tannadyce looked him straight in the eyes, and seeing that he was thoroughly cowed severed his bonds with his penknife and went out to fee the hungry harpies waiting in the street. Hooligan peered through the blind at the proceeding, and when the group had broken up he flung himself into the chair which he had lately occupied as a prisoner.

"The office—yes, Croal or no Croal, once more," he muttered as his great red paw savagely snatched at the brandy bottle.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A SIGNET RING

"WELL, I'm jiggered!" sighed Tidmarsh in face of one of the greatest surprises that had ever overtaken him. The exclamation was vented at the entrance to the court, and was caused by seeing old Mr. Beauchamp carefully steered by Nance into the building where "Parker's Lightning Finals" was located.

Mr. Tidmarsh, being a slow thinker, had allowed a whole day and two nights to elapse during which he ruminated unceasingly on the strange utterance of Nance on suddenly recognizing Tannadyce's private cab at the Bremner's door. But this morning he had set out to follow the father and daughter from Islington, determined to learn more about them before asking for an explanation.

The girl's reference to the Grand Stand and to the morning of Starlight's trial seemed to point to her having been on Epsom Downs about the time of the murder, and, remembering the evidence at the inquest, Tidmarsh's first impression was that she might be the young lady who had been mentioned as present at the trial in the company of Sir Charles Roylance. But her recognition, real or fancied, of the cab had been accompanied by a look and tone of horror, suggesting that the memory of

that morning was fraught with associations very much out of the common, and Tidmarsh had nearly decided to ask her as a favour to tell him anything she knew.

And now he was knocked all of a heap by the discovery that the poor but supposed aristocratic lodgers in Beaker Street ran a tipster's office—a branch of "racing" for which he, as a bookmaker, had neither liking nor respect. Mr. Beauchamp's curious advice to Bremner to back Starlight recurred to him, and was more than explained if Miss Beauchamp had witnessed a favourable trial of the horse,

This lowering of the Beauchamps in the social scale made it more probable in Mr. Tidmarsh's sight that they might be mixed up in the tragedy so near his heart, but he was mindful of their kindness to the Bremners, and so puzzled by the complexity of the amazing situation, that he had need of a "breather" before taking action. After satisfying himself that the premises were occupied only by some people on the ground floor and by the tipster upstairs, he retired to a near public-house to consider his plan of campaign.

Mr. Tidmarsh, as a suburban sportsman, was more at home at his beloved *Union Jack* than in Fleet Street hostelries. The chatter of the crowd of what he called "littery blokes" in the outer bar was so bewildering to him that having got himself served he edged away from the counter and was carrying his glass into an inner room, when he inadvertently trod on a boot.

In an instant a flushed, ferocious face was glaring into his, and he was assailed with a wealth of abuse that made him blush for the first time for years. Never a quarrelsome man, he murmured an apology, and, escaping into the sanctuary, sat down at one of the tables.

"Scott!" he exclaimed to a waiter who had witnessed the occurrence from the doorway, "it's no wonder these chaps can write if that's the way they can talk."

"Lor' bless you, sir, he ain't a paper man," was the reply. "That's Lord Hooligan—the coster peer, they calls him, and a libel on the costers. He's a bit thick this morning, but no one takes any notice of him here."

In the meanwhile Nance, on the top floor in the court, was going through the weary round of reading turf intelligence to her father, of taking down his dictated prophecies, and of addressing envelopes. The task was doubly weary to-day, for she had heard nothing of Sir Charles Roylance since the accident on Sunday, and she had, moreover, that morning received a letter at her lodgings which might account for his silence.

It was from Lady Alice Mashiter, written in the third person, and couched in the coldest terms, as follows :—

"THE HOLLIES, BARFIELD-ON-THAMES.

"Lady Alice Mashiter presents her compliments and begs to say that she regrets to have to cancel the standing invitation which she extended to Miss Beauchamp to visit her on Sundays. Lady Alice was surprised and grieved that Miss Beauchamp, instead of insisting on being landed at Barfield, should have proceeded to London in the company of a person of Mr. Tannadyce's reputation and profession."

Having finished her first batch of correspondence, Nance took out the letter and read it again, tears welling into her eyes over the curt hostility of the spinisterial effusion. All the world seemed to be

against her. She had fallen into disgrace with the people she cared most to stand well with, and the bitterness of it was that she knew now that it was quite reasonable for them to put the worst construction on her conduct.

For Moses Cohen, before his departure from the Bremners', had enlightened her more fully as to the evil life and heartless character of the son who preferred the name of Leopold Tannadyce to his own patronymic. What the aged Jew told her was amply borne out by her own experience on Sunday when he had taken her to the club.

She was even now ignorant of the name of that unsavoury resort, and, not being aware of Tannadyce's designs against Sir Charles Roylance, she could not guess his motives for introducing her into a place which instinct had at once told her was not fit for a decent woman—for all its gorgeous luxury and smart frequenters.

Tannadyce had induced her to enter on the pretext that they would probably find his mythical "sister" there; but Nance, made uncomfortable by the bold stares of the male members and the ruder gaze of the ladies, had almost immediately demanded to be taken out. Tannadyce had assented, stipulating only that she should wait till a club waiter had fetched a cab, his secret instructions to the man being to ascertain if any one was loitering about outside, and to run round to the mews and bring his private vehicle. The object of this was to ensure that Sir Charles had gone away and to secure the services of the invaluable Skinner in case they should be required; but, as we have already seen, the device was in a fair way to have wider consequences.

On the arrival of the cab, he had made an ineffectual effort to persuade the girl to see his "sister"

at his flat, but the club experience had sown the seeds of distrust, and, thoroughly alarmed, she had firmly refused to be driven anywhere but home —with the result we know.

"If Lady Alice knew what happened after I re-returned to town with the undesirable person she would have put more sting into her letter," Nance sighed, as she tore it up and dropped the pieces into the basket.

But, troubled as she was, she could not feel wholly depressed while the betting quotations in the papers told her that Starlight had receded to a price at which his owner could back him to retrieve his fortunes. It made no difference to her loyalty that Sir Charles had apparently not cared to ascertain whether she had been injured in the running down of the punt. She was willing to forgive his pique at her association with Tannadyce, since the glorious fact remained that Hooligan had vanished from her horizon like a bad dream, and her ruse with the duplicate circular had counteracted his intervention.

Curiously enough, while Hooligan was in her thoughts, Mr. Beauchamp alluded to his late partner. "I cannot understand, much as I rejoice at his absence, why Lord Hooligan has not been near us," said the old gentleman. "We were to share profits weekly, and there must be a considerable sum due to him."

"Eight pounds odd. I have it ready for him, done up in an envelope in the drawer," Nance replied. "If he does not call for it we must discover his private address and send it to him." She could not add that she had no expectation of his coming for the money after the scare she had administered to him—a really well-founded scare, though she knew it not.

"I think I should feel easier if that money could be sent to him at once," Mr. Beauchamp remarked after a pause. "You might run out and ask for the loan of a directory at some shop, so that we can forward a remittance to-day. He is not the sort of person one cares to be under an obligation to."

Nance agreed, and putting on her hat went out in search of the desired information. It was some time before she found a shop furnished with a recent directory, and having done so at last, she turned its pages for a long while in a vain quest for Lord Hooligan's address—for the simple reason that it was not there. As a mere resident in furnished rooms, his lordship's name was not inserted.

To return to Mr. Tidmarsh in the inner room at the public-house. It took him five minutes to recover his equanimity, and forty-five more to decide to approach Nance at once, rather than defer his questions till she was at home in Beaker Street. But his impatience to sift the Epsom mystery prevailed, and he sallied forth, not without an apprehensive glance as he passed through the bar for "the coster peer." Being a man with a set purpose, needing all his energies of mind and body to wreak vengeance on his sister's murderer, he was relieved to find that the foul-mouthed nobleman had departed.

Wending his way up the flagged court, he turned into the doorway of the ancient building and ascended the stairs, trying to frame as he went a polite request to be enlightened upon the occurrences of that morning on the Surrey Downs. It was a delicate business, he knew, and he wanted to perform it delicately; for, though he had no respect for the calling of a "Turf adviser," he had a very great respect for the blind man and his

daughter, who from their slender purse had paid out Frank Bremner's man in possession.

Though he would have resented the impeachment vigorously, Mr. Tidmarsh, snapper-up of shillings and "half-dollars" for a starting-price book though he was, had a large heart concealed somewhere in his huge frame.

Passing under the skylight at the head of the stairs, he halted for a moment to read the neat card inscribed "Parker's Lightning Finals," and then opened the door of the office. The table was littered with papers, as though the room had recently been occupied; a drawer, too, in the table was open, but there was no one visible.

"Funny!" he muttered. "They must have gone out to lunch, though it's early for that—barely twelve—and they left the door on latch, too, with all their precious secrets lying about."

With the disgust of a heavy man who has fruitlessly mounted a flight of stairs, he was looking ruefully round preparatory to descending, when his eye was caught by a pile of printed circulars on the table. Moved by professional curiosity to see what advice was being sent out to subscribers, he advanced into the room and perused the topmost circular.

"By George! that's a queer go," he exclaimed. "If these are their sentiments, whatever did the old gent go and put Frank on to Starlight for?"

For it was Nance's privately printed letter, fictiously announcing the breakdown of Sir Charles Roylance's horse—the same which, though it had done the baronet good service, had annoyed him so on Sunday.

"There's more in this than meets the eye," Tidmarsh mused. "People in this line of business ain't much given to admitting errors, which is what

this amounts to—seeing that they appear to have tipped the colt to begin with. I should like——"

Stopping in the middle of his reflections he held his breath under the influence of a discovery as swift as it was appalling. Standing by the table, a sudden movement of his foot had brought him in contact with a man lying on the floor, who on his entrance had not been visible from the doorway. With a stifled cry of alarm, Billy stooped over the prone silent figure, and saw that it was old Mr. Beauchamp.

There was a terrible bruise on the old man's forehead, and a thin stream issuing from the cut lips had begun to form a little red pool that was slowly encarmining the silver hair. For a moment Tidmarsh thought that he had succumbed to the brutal treatment to which he had evidently been subjected, but a hasty examination showed that the heart still beat.

Mr. Tidmarsh rose in consternation, prepared to do his duty and summon assistance, though well aware that the prejudice against bookmakers might put him into an awkward plight. The police and the public would be sure to suspect him of the assault, even if he was not charged with it.

He was making for the door when once again an object on the floor drew his attention—not a human wreck this time, but a glittering circlet of gold that lay against the wainscot. Picking it up he found that he held in his hand a signet ring, engraved with a crest which, in the dim light struggling through the uncleaned window, he failed to decipher.

But ever since the inquest, and still more since Inspector Croal had shown him the sheet of notepaper, the idea of a signet ring had been buzzing in his mind, and he carried it to the window for closer scrutiny. He did it intuitively, and with very little

expectation of being rewarded, but his gaze had no sooner settled on the onyx stone than he uttered a hoarse cry of astonishment.

"Good heavens!" he murmured. "It's just that same dancing pussy-cat that the 'tec showed me."

The crest was undoubtedly a rampant lion. Mr. Tidmarsh did not know it by that name, but he recognized it as the device that was to be looked for on the ring which had left its mark on poor murdered Bessie's throat.

## CHAPTER XX

### SORROW AND SHAME

MR. TIDMARSH roused himself with an effort from gloating over the ring which had so strangely come into his possession. Humanity demanded that he should procure assistance for Mr. Beauchamp, but his discovery changed his intention as to his method of procuring it. The idea that slowly percolated into his mind was that, before reporting anything to the police, he must learn from the injured man the name of his assailant.

It was necessary to his thirst for personal vengeance to forestall Inspector Croal, and he recognized that his finding of the signet crested with a rampant lion in a room occupied by the girl who had been on the Downs on the morning of the murder gave him a tremendous pull over that astute officer—if he could only discover how to use it to advantage.

He sighed regretfully as he thought that that was where the difference between an amateur and a professional detective came in ; but, anyhow, he had got the ring, and he meant to keep it and the knowledge of it to himself till he knew who had so brutally assaulted the blind old man. Then it would be comparatively easy to ascertain if the culprit was entitled to wear such a ring, in which

case Mr. Tidmarsh was open to lay odds that he would be able to bring the greater crime home to him also.

Putting the heavy gold circlet in his pocket, he had another look at the motionless figure and went downstairs. On his way out of the court he thrust his head into one of the offices below and said that he thought an old gentleman on the top floor had been taken ill, as he seemed to have fallen off his chair. Waiting till a lad had been dispatched to investigate, the bookmaker melted into the Fleet Street crowd—apart from other considerations, not sorry to have delegated the duty of raising the alarm.

So it was that when Nance returned from her futile search for Lord Hooligan's name in the directory she found a surgeon bending over her father's prostrate form and a couple of constables examining the room.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried, clasping her hands in despair. Even in that first moment there surged into her brain the thought that here at last in this tragedy, whatever it was, was exposure, staunchly as she had fought against it. Then grief vanquished selfishness, and she flung herself down to weep over the blood-dabbled silver head.

"He is my father," she explained. "I left him alone and perfectly well three-quarters of an hour ago."

"He has been very seriously assaulted, and is suffering from concussion of the brain, in addition to other injuries," replied the surgeon. "He will probably recover, but he must be removed to the hospital at once. I have sent for an ambulance."

"And there may have been a robbery, miss," said one of the policemen. "Will you kindly look at this?"

Nance rose sobbing, and saw at a glance that the table drawer which she had left locked had been wrenched violently open, and that the envelope containing the share of profits set apart for Hooligan had been abstracted. It was a case of vulgar robbery, then, she told herself, and the first suspicion that this was the work of the ruffian peer was dissolved. No one but a raving lunatic would half murder a blind man to obtain a payment which he could have had for the asking.

"Yes," she said, "there was nearly eight pounds in that drawer, and it is gone. But, oh! never mind that. Are you sure, sir, that he is not fatally injured? When will he be able to speak to me?"

"That's what we should like to know. Without his description of the man who did it we are just nowhere," said the senior constable.

But the surgeon could only reply that it might be days before the victim of such terrible treatment could recover consciousness. The concussion had been caused by a blow that would have felled an ox, and it must have been delivered by a powerful man under the influence of unrestrained fury.

"It'll turn out to be some person dissatisfied with the tips sent him," remarked the second policeman sententiously—a view of the case which Nance herself was inclined to adopt.

Further conjecture was cut short by the arrival of the ambulance and the removal of the injured man. After locking up the office Nance followed sadly to the hospital, where she was informed that everything possible would be done for her father, but that it was quite uncertain when he would be able to give information. As soon as he recovered consciousness the hospital authorities would communicate with her and with the police.

So said the house surgeon on coming down from

the ward to the hall, where Nance and one of the constables awaited the official opinion.

"And, by the way, you must leave your address," said the young medico. "I don't suppose you live at the place where this outrage happened."

There and then Nance was confronted with the bugbear of exposure, so dreaded through these last weeks. It was absolutely necessary for her to give her address at the lodgings at Islington and her right name, yet her doing so would publish to the world the secret she had so sedulously concealed. However, there was no way out of it if she was to keep touch with her father's illness, so she gave her address in Beaker Street and her name as Beauchamp.

"That'll be the old gentleman's name, too, then, miss?" said the policeman, reproducing his notebook with alacrity. "I've got him down as Parker —noticed it on the door."

"Yes, his name is Beauchamp," replied Nance with a choking sob, and so she went out into the sunshine of the summer day, dazed with the knowledge that in an hour an account of the affair would be in the evening journals, to be amplified in next morning's papers, and that Sir Charles Roylance would inevitably see it. If the people of her old world looked askance at her because of her supposed acquaintance with Mr. Tannadyce the moneylender, what would they think of her when they found that she was in truth the "girl from 'Parker's Lightning Finals'?"

And though she was sure of good Mary Bremner's sympathy and friendship, as also of that of Mary's thriftless husband, that shame had to be faced as well. The one concession Mr. Beauchamp had made to her sensitive disgust with the calling into which he had forced her had been the preservation of the

dignity of poor but respectable gentlefolk under the roof where they lived. That innocent deception would be no longer possible now. She would have to take her place on the level which she felt with a bitter pang of right belonged to her—among the great army of London's hoverers on the narrow margin that lies between sharp practice and crime.

The question of "ways and means," too, loomed ominously ahead on the hopeless horizon. She had funds enough for some weeks to come, but with the striking down of her father all source of income had suddenly ceased, for, though she had been the eyes and brains of the wretched business, she could not carry it on alone. And now that the office would be closed she might at any moment be called upon by Hooligan not only to repay the weekly share of profits that had been stolen but to refund the capital sum that he had put into the business, which latter payment would be quite impossible. All the money had been sunk in gaining fresh clients.

The one ray of light to pierce the gloom was that her subterfuges, shifts, and expedients to rectify the harm done to Sir Charles Roylance's prospects had not been fruitless. He might despise her and even hate her, but nothing could alter the fact that, but for her, Hooligan's baleful influence over her father would have achieved its object.

As it was, Starlight was quoted that day at 12 to 1, with the cheering addition, "no takers."

With which crumb of comfort Nance had to be content as she turned her weary way northward to Islington.

## CHAPTER XXI

### WAS IT A CLUE ?

NANCE'S surmise that the murderous assault on Mr. Beauchamp would find its way into the evening papers was quickly verified. The victim not being apparently of social importance, and his injuries not necessarily fatal, only a short paragraph setting forth the bare facts was devoted to the occurrence, but it was sufficient to whet the appetite of Mr. Inspector Croal for more.

That shrewd investigator read it in a special *Star*, over his late tea, in the parlour of his snug little box in the Battersea Park Road. Pausing in the delicate process of topping and tailing a particularly plump shrimp, he annoyed his wife by replacing the succulent morsel on his plate and jumping up from the table.

"Duty, my dear—spotted something in the paper," was all the explanation he deigned to give, and a minute later was bowling away in one of those speedy cabs that always seem to turn up in the nick of time for leading lights of "the Yard." The case was outside his own jurisdiction, belonging exclusively to the City Police, so his destination was the headquarters of that muscular force in the Old Jewry, where he was presently closeted with the inspector on duty.

Mr. Croal cultivated the best relations with his City colleagues, but he wasn't the man to allow his laurels to be snatched away, and he treated the subject of his call carelessly. He wanted no poachers on his own domain of the Epsom murder.

"I say, Drewett, what about this tipster who's been nearly murdered?" he began. "Have you got the chap, or anything of a clue? I thought it might have a bearing on a little case I'm on."

"Yours will be a Turf case—raid on a club or a pub, eh?" said Mr. Drewett. "Well," he continued, when Croal had nodded and winked most mendaciously, "we haven't made an arrest, and, between ourselves, there's nothing to move on. Some one gone broke through backing the old boy's tips, I suppose, did it—a paltry affair, so far as we are concerned."

"Ah, yes; paltry's the word for it; but little fish are sweet, you know," said Mr. Croal with vague affability. "There'd be no objection to my inspecting the room and taking a look at their lists of names if there should happen to be any lying about, would there? I might drop on some evidence against my little lot that way, and, of course, I'd give you prompt information if I stumbled on anything likely to give you a line to the old man's assailant."

The City inspector gave the required consent, with the additional information that the key of the room had been left by "the girl" at an office on the ground floor. As a night watchman was kept there would be no difficulty in obtaining the key.

On reaching the court Mr. Croal found that this was the case, and on producing his card was at once given free access by the watchman. It was now nine o'clock and nearly dark, but the man told him that he would find a gas-jet in "Parker's" office.

"It's a sultry night, sir, and I'll take the opportunity of letting in a breath of fresh air while you're upstairs," he added, as he retired into the premises, leaving the street door open.

Groping his way to the top floor, the inspector let himself into the dingy room, and, after lighting the gas, glanced curiously round, his keen eyes noting in detail the smashed door, the freshly-scrubbed patch on the floor where Mr. Beauchamp had fallen, and the litter of papers which Nance, in her agitation, had left lying about.

Seating himself at the table, the detective commenced a systematic examination of the papers, and had not been long at it when he was struck by the conflicting terms of the circulars drawn up respectively by Hooligan and Nance; nor did he fail to observe that they both referred to a horse belonging to Sir Charles Roylance. The discrepancy was doubly puzzling to him as he had no knowledge that the circulars were the work of different hands.

"The whole business seems to circle round that young baronet," he muttered. "Yet I'd take my oath, so far as you can be certain of anything, that he never had anything to do with Bessie Beckford."

He had just put one of each of the circulars in his pocket-book, when his sharp ears caught the sound of a creak on the worm-eaten stairs. It came from far down, but, listening intently, he heard it repeated—nearer this time. There was no doubt of it—some one was stealthily ascending the stairs.

Quickly and quietly rising from the table, he opened the door of the cupboard into which Nance had been thrust by Hooligan, saw that it would suit his purpose, and, after turning out the gas in the office, shut himself in the little chamber. The door of the outer room was closed but not locked, and on

entering he had taken the precaution to pocket the key.

He stood very still, and presently heard the office door tried softly and then pushed open. These sounds were followed by a deep sigh and by the unctuous tones of a man's voice saying:

"Well, well! but this is indeed fortunate. I hardly dared hope to find the place open and deserted."

Then suddenly a match flared up, and Croal, glueing his eye to a knothole in the cupboard door, nearly broke into laughter at what he saw. A person dressed in clergyman's garb was lighting the gas, and all the time kept talking to himself in jerky little sentences that gave him away completely.

"They must have some record of my address here," the reverend gentleman mumbled, seating himself at the table. "There will be all sorts of —er—publicity after this occurrence, and I must destroy all traces, as luck has so favoured me."

He searched about for a while with tremulous fingers, but without finding what he sought; and suddenly his soliloquies flew off at a tangent on his lighting on some tips of a minor race meeting which Mr. Beauchamp had dictated to Nance that morning just before the catastrophe that had overtaken him.

"Oh, dear me; but this is—er—most fortunate. I'll make a note of this. What wonderful sources of information those people must have, and how sad—er—very sad, that the gifted proprietor should have been struck down. That powerful young man who attended to me when I called to subscribe couldn't have been in the office at the time."

Mr. Croal pricked up his ears at this. It was the first he had heard of any one being engaged in the business of "Parker's Lightning Finals" besides the

blind man and his daughter. And another thing was beginning to dawn on him—that somewhere he had recently seen this anxious cleric in connexion with the case he was on. The hole through which he was peering did not admit of a very close scrutiny, and he decided that more might be gained by revealing himself than by remaining in concealment.

Mr. Quintree's face when the inspector opened the cupboard door and stepped out into the room would have been a rich prize to an artist desirous of a model of human terror. He was too frightened to move. He sat perfectly still, with his jaw dropped and wide-open staring eyes. Seeing him now full face, Croal knew him directly as the man who had crossed the stile with an elderly lady into the lane where he had been waiting for Sir Charles Roylance two Sundays ago.

"No need to be alarmed, sir," said the detective pleasantly. "I am a police-officer, but I haven't got anything against you that I know of. How are things down at Barfield-on-Thames?"

"Oh dear, oh dear; but the fellow recognizes me!" ejaculated Mr. Quintree piteously, and far from reassured by Croal's soothing manner. "I—I saw something in the evening papers about the—er—lamentable incident here, and as I was passing, quite by chance, I thought I would just look up and view the scene," he tried to explain.

The inspector would have good-naturedly ignored the lie if he could, but it was necssary to pin the visitor down as a subscriber to "Parker's" in order to question him as to the "powerful young man" who had received his subscription; so he affected sternness.

"Come, sir; that's a little too thin on the top of the conversation you've been holding with yourself for the last five minutes," he said severely. "If

you chose to subscribe for Turf advice it's no business of mine, and I shan't speak about it, but I'm here to learn what I can about these people. After reading the old gentleman's name in the papers you are, of course, aware that I wasn't so far out about that young lady at Barfield. Sir Charles Roylance's indignation was rather misplaced, eh ? "

Now Mr. Quintree had no great liking for the young baronet, who, with an honest man's instinct for a humbug, treated him with levity, and chaffed the anti-gambling discourses which he served up piping hot to suit his pet parishioner, Lady Alice. So he assented to Croal's assertion, though he knew very well that Sir Charles, that Sunday at any rate, had no suspicion of Nance.

" My young friend Roylance is—er—not all that could be wished," he mouthed out pompously. " And as for the—er—young person whom he foisted on to his excellent aunt, we were sadly undeceived in her last Sunday. It transpired that she was on terms of intimacy with an—er—most deplorable character—Mr. Tannadyce, the moneylender, who holds the mortgages on the Roylance estates."

" Lord, what a tangle ! " Croal muttered under his breath. It was no news to him that Nance was acquainted with Tannadyce, for he had seen them enter the Razzle Dazzle Club together and afterwards drive away in the private cab ; but he had been ignorant of Tannadyce's interest in Sir Charles' affairs. This sleek, well-fed visitor, plucking up heart of grace in the hope of obscuring his own laxities by besmirching some one else, was inspiring the detective with new ideas with a vengeance, and they were not flattering to the girl who at that moment was weeping her eyes out in her cramped little bedroom in Beaker Street.

Scotland Yard experts do not show it when they

think they have gained enlightenment, so Croal passed lightly to his next question.

"I gathered from what you dropped just now that she did not attend to you when you called here first?"

"Oh dear, that unfortunate habit of thinking aloud!" bewailed Mr. Quintree. "No, she wasn't here, or of course I should have felt it my duty to expose—no, I don't see how I could have done that, but I should have advised my friends in the village to be careful."

"This chap would have been a long-firm fraud if luck hadn't made him a parson," Croal reflected. "Who was in the office on that occasion?" he asked. "You said something about a young man."

"A coarse creature, my dear sir, was the sole tenant of this apartment when I—er—perhaps inadvisedly entered it," replied Quintree. "He was a burly red-faced fellow of ill manners, youngish in years, perhaps, put hardened, I fear, in every kind of depravity."

The description instantly reminded the inspector of that other description furnished to him by the landlady of the *Angler's Rest* of the brutal scamp who had deserted poor Bessie Beckford, and he remembered that the riverside inn was in this gentleman's parish.

"Had you ever seen this man before, say at Barfield-on-Thames—not recently, but about a year ago?" he asked with restrained eagerness.

"Never at Barfield or anywhere else; but then he was not the sort of person who would be likely to set foot in church," was the reply which Croal, in the absence of any reason for falsehood, rightly took to be the truth.

After this the inspector lent his active aid in the

search for the address-book, and, having quickly discovered it on the mantelpiece, turned the leaves till it came to the Reverend Mr. Quintree's name and place of abode in a different handwriting from those preceding, though several entries in the same clumsy calligraphy appeared subsequently. To the plaintive entreaties of Mr. Quintree to destroy the page he turned a deaf ear, promising, however, to keep the book in his own possession, and not to divulge that troublesome entry.

"Counsel for the Crown will do that fast enough at the police court, and afterwards at the Old Bailey," he told himself grimly, when the dejected figure in black had departed to catch his train at Waterloo.

Croal sat long pondering over what he had heard, and when at length he locked up the office, taking the address-book with him, he had formed the theory that Nance Beauchamp was guilty of murder—not with her own hands, but as an accessory either before or after the act, or both.

"Whoever wrote that sly parson's name in the book killed Bessie Beckford, and the girl must be a friend of his, or he wouldn't be helping her run this show," the inspector muttered. "It's admitted that she was in the gorse-bushes about the time. The description don't fit Mr. Leopold Tannadyce or I'd run him in to-night, but he's in it somewhere—as chief wirepuller, I'll lay a sov."

So it was that in the morning Mr. Tidmarsh had left that room in possession of the clue of the signet ring, and now in the evening Mr. Croal left it with the clue of the handwriting in the book. But before them lay respectively the tasks of discovering whose was the ring and whose was the handwriting.

Which was to win—the expert or the amateur?

The dogged sleuth-hound of the law, whose one ambition was to see his prisoner confronted by a black-capped judge, or the warm-hearted emotional bookmaker, with fingers itching for the throat of his sister's murderer ?



## CHAPTER XXII

### WHAT MR. TIDMARSH HEARD AT NATHAN'S

NEXT day, during the dinner-hour at the neighing factory, Mr. Tidmarsh loomed largely in the public bar of his favourite hostelry. This was the side of the house where he did most business—where, as he used to say in happier days, he "earned silk-lined skirts for the missus."

But the way of transgressors is hard, and Mr. Tidmarsh proved the truth of the old adage by having to put up with rather a rough time while raking in the mainstay of existence. He missed the stool in the corner of the cosy saloon bar, on which he was wont to balance his weighty person during his dealings with equally ardent but less numerous patrons in City garb.

To-day the paper-hatted factory hands were "doing a bit," as they called it, at Newmarket, which sporting centre not one of them had ever seen or was likely to see. But it is given to professors of Mr. Tidmarsh's calling to annihilate time and space for such as they, and the toiling wage-earners streamed into the *Union Jack*, as keen to back their fancy as if they were debouching on to the classic heath.

Tidmarsh leaned against the pewter-topped

counter, ostensibly chatting to the landlord, but actually engaged in receiving the betting slips and cash handed to him without much attempt at secrecy by the customers. Long immunity from the attentions of the police had made the frequenters of the place careless, but there was a rod in pickle for them to-day.

It was one of the potmen who first sounded a warning note by whispering to his employer that "there were strangers in the gallery," at the same time furtively indicating three men in paper hats who sat on a bench just inside the swing doors. The phrase was a prearranged signal, denoting that there were persons present who were not what they seemed.

"Are you sure?" asked the landlord anxiously.

"Several of the factory boys have given me the tip that that lot don't belong there," the potman replied. "Those caps look fishy."

"Come here, Bill," the proprietor whispered over the counter. "Have you done anything with those fellows on the bench?"

"Yes, they've bet a bob each," said Tidmarsh.

"Anything wrong with them?"

"Ikey thinks so; anyway, better be careful. Ah, by George, but it's too late."

For the three suspects had suddenly risen from the bench, two to place themselves at the swing doors while the third advanced to the principal culprit amid general cries from the customers of "Coppers!"

"I'm sorry for this, but it's a clear case," said the disguised sergeant, trying to hide his elation. "We must have the names and addresses of all in the bar. You, Mr. Landlord, will be summoned for permitting betting on licensed premises, and as for you, Mr. Tidmarsh, I'm afraid I must trouble you to come to the station with me."

"What, you're never going to lock me up?" cried Mr. Tidmarsh in consternation. The thought that he would be searched and that the signet ring round which all his hopes centred would be found upon him, filled him with dismay, and fishing out a five-pound note he gazed at it suggestively. "Now, I put it to you straight," he added, mopping his brow and fingering the note, "am I a figger for a plank bed in a station cell, even for one night? I shan't run away, being a 'ouseholder in Beaker Street. Couldn't you proceed by summons?"

The sergeant winked imperceptibly at the "fiver," and Billy carelessly restored it to his pocket, much too sharp to hand it over there and then. But the little pantomime was well understood, and the officer affected to reconsider his decision.

"Well, I'll take it on myself to make it a summons, as you reside in the street," he said good-naturedly. He had got a good case, and the prospect of a reward for his leniency when he should call at Mr. Tidmarsh's house after dark, and he was well satisfied. His subordinates having noted down the names and addresses of the minor culprits, he withdrew to apply for the summonses.

"We ain't got a leg to stand on," said the landlord sorrowfully when the hurly-burly had died away. "And that sweep had a turkey off me and a couple of bottles of the best last Christmas."

But the bookmaker's agitation subsided quickly, now that the danger to the precious ring had passed, and having consoled the landlord he set out to confront one of the usual risks of his calling in the usual way. Legal advice was his first necessity. That he would be fined was a foregone conclusion, but he knew from experience that the amount of his fine would depend on the eloquence of his barrister. The eminent firm of Nathan had served him well

before, and though they were expensive they should serve him again.

"They'll get more knocked off the magistrates' bill than they'll stick on in costs, and it'll be cheaper in the end," he told himself as he alighted at the solicitor's office.

At the inquiry desk he asked for Frank Bremner, thinking to confide in his friend first, but the clerk was out writ-serving, and Billy was shown into Mr. Nathan junior's ante-room, to wait till that busy young lawyer should be disengaged. At present there was a client with him.

Billy sat down, and taking up the *Times*, a journal he despised, tried to read the sporting intelligence. But the buzz of voices behind the baize-covered door distracted him—more, perhaps, than if the words of the conversation had been audible, and he laid the paper aside.

Then suddenly a man's voice rang out so clear and incisive that its note of triumph penetrated the door and rendered Mr. Tidmarsh an unintentional eavesdropper.

"Starlight's as good as mine, then, Mr. Nathan, and he'll never pull the chestnuts out of the fire for Roylance after all," was the assertion that fell on the bookmaker's astonished ears.

The startling announcement from behind the baize door took Mr. Tidmarsh's breath away. Not only was it interesting to him as a bookmaker who had already laid several bets against Starlight, but Sir Charles Roylance's colt was beginning to be interlaced with the all-absorbing pursuit of his sister's murderer.

His knowledge on this point was not so extensive as Inspector Croal's, but the Beauchamps had come largely into the perspective of the mystery, and Starlight's chances of winning the big race had, he

knew, entered most perplexingly into the calculations of the blind tipster and his beautiful daughter. First there had been the old gentleman's gratuitous advice to Frank Bremner to back the horse, and then he (Tidmarsh) had perused the circular in the tipping office advising the public to do nothing of the kind.

Mr. Tidmarsh was not greatly troubled with delicacy, and, having been an unintentional listener, he saw no harm in trying to hear a little more. He rose and tiptoed to the baize door, but a commotion within caused him to instantly resume his seat and bury his face in the newspaper. The conclave was breaking up, and the individual who had so boldly laid claim to Sir Charles Roylance's horse was coming out. A moment later he made his appearance, ushered out by young Mr. Nathan with all the deference due to a wealthy client. It was Mr. Leopold Tannadyce, whom Mr. Tidmarsh had last seen from Frank Bremner's area, when he was being abused by Moses Cohen.

Possibly conscious of that incautious exclamation, both the solicitor and his client glanced curiously at the bookmaker as they passed through the anteroom, but Tannadyce did not recognize him as the man who had been hidden in the obscurity of the area. Young Mr. Nathan, however, never forgot a face, or any incident connected with those who at any time consulted the firm.

"I don't suppose you know who that big chap is," said the solicitor, when they reached the outer office. "He's the brother of the once celebrated Bessie Beckford, who was murdered on Epsom Downs a fortnight ago."

Tannadyce started imperceptibly, but controlled his features. "Really?" he said carelessly. "I saw something about it in the papers. Well, goodbye, Nathan. Get the needful documents ready at

once. I'll see that there's no mistake made at Barron's place."

When the junior partner returned from showing out the more important client, he invited Tidmarsh into his sanctum, and was impressed by the bookmaker's incoherence in describing the raid on the *Union Jack*.

"Tidmarsh has got something weightier on his mind than a betting prosecution," he reflected, after promising to do his best to reduce the inevitable fine.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE LONELY HOUSE AT MITCHAM

ON the morning after his call on Messrs. Nathan and Nathan, the Napoleon of usury sat in the private room of his palatial offices at the foot of Regent Street, engaged in giving some private instructions to his confidential man, Skinner.

"You understand, then," he was saying, "that you are to get yourself up as a stableman out of work, and apply to Mr. Barron, the trainer at Epsom, for a job. I want you to look quite respectable, but just shabby enough to tally with being really anxious for a situation."

"Yes, sir; that's clear," replied the laconic groom.

"I don't suppose for a moment that you will be engaged without references, but that is quite immaterial, as I have no idea of parting from you," Tannadyce proceeded. "What I require is that while you are at the stables in the character of an applicant for a place, you shall contrive somehow to ascertain, without the possibility of mistake, the position of the stall occupied by Sir Charles Roylance's three-year-old, Starlight. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, sir; that ought to come easy," Skinner replied.

"Good! There are a couple of sovereigns for any treating that may be necessary. And now—you have brought Lord Hooligan from his lodging?"

"He is waiting outside, sir."

"Did he make any objection to coming?"

"He cursed a lot, sir, but I gave him your message—that if he didn't come you wouldn't answer for the consequences to him."

"Good again! Now get away to Epsom as fast as you can, please, and ask Lord Hooligan to step in."

When the broken-down nobleman entered, Tannadyce saw at a glance that he had been drinking heavily overnight. His henchman's heavy lids, yellow eyeballs, and tremulous lips told their own tale of care drowned in the wine-cup, but the money-lender affected his most friendly demeanour.

"Poor old Hooly, you mustn't get down on your luck because that nasty temper of yours has led you into another mistake," he began. "You've been lying low, I imagine, on the top of a little occurrence that I read of in the evening papers two days ago. I saw your Roman hand in that, and I don't deny that you had received provocation."

"Why couldn't you let me alone?" Hooligan retorted sullenly. "It gives me the jumps to go out in the streets."

"My dear boy, it was to spare you the jumps that I sent for you; I think you will be safer out of the way for a while," said Tannadyce. "I have ascertained that Croal is turning his attention to the Beauchamps, and through them he might eventually fox out a trail to you. What do you say to going out of town to a quiet house in Surrey till this has blown over?"

Hooligan eyed his patron suspiciously. "You've

got an axe of your own to grind in this," he said in the same sullen tone.

"I make no secret of that," Tannadyce replied with an air of seeming frankness. "Naturally, I don't want to be mixed up in a public scandal, as I should be if it became a police case. *Two* police cases," he added significantly.

"The 'tec would soon find me in Surrey or anywhere else—once he'd got the right scent through that Beauchamp girl. It's only a question of time," Hooligan growled dejectedly.

"I grant you that—provided he does get at Miss Beauchamp," said Tannadyce, watching the other warily. "But that contingency is to be provided against in the same way. How would you like to have that very mischievous young lady as a companion in your seclusion? Doesn't that strike you as a charming prospect, eh?"

For the first time for many days an evil grin chased the scowl from Hooligan's debased countenance. "How are you going to work it?" said his lordship briskly.

But Tannadyce would say no more till they had seen the house, which he had selected from an agent's list as offering the advantages of isolation and being ready furnished. They set out at once for Waterloo, whence a slow suburban train took them to Mitcham. The first two porters at the station whom they questioned had never heard of the Rook's Nest, as the house was called; but the third had an opinion to offer.

"I didn't know it had a name, gentlemen; but I reckon you mean a crazy old place between Morden and Carshalton," said the man. "It's on a by-road, half a mile from anywhere. No family has lived there for years, but I think there's a caretaker *on* the premises."

"That must be it; the advertisement says apply to the caretaker," replied Tannadyce. "We had better take a fly."

"Now look here, Hooly," he proceeded when they were in the vehicle, "you have got to appear as the principal in this deal. In the very improbable event of your being run to ground I don't want to have it said that I connived at your disappearance by taking the house for you. Give a false name and say that you require a quiet residence to recover from an illness in. That'll do to begin with, and then, if the caretaker proves to be a woman and I think her suited to the job, we'll engage her to remain. There'll be the cooking to do, and it will be more decent for Miss Beauchamp to have a woman to wait upon her."

"To play gaoler, you mean," Hooligan sniggered. Out here in the open country he was throwing off some of his nervous tremors.

"Well, if the lady has the bad taste to object to remain as a willing guest she will have to remain as an unwilling one," said Tannadyce. "And you had better bear in mind that if she gets out before I think fit to release her, you will be in a worse plight than ever."

After a drive of over two miles the fly turned into a lane, running between high hedgerows with ploughed fields on either side. A quarter of a mile up this lane it stopped at some rusty iron gates leading into a moss grown carriage-drive, but on dismounting the flyman failed to move the encrusted hinges, and announced that his fares would have to walk up to the house, of which at present there was no sign.

Passing through a small side-gate, which was in working order, the moneylender and his noble jackal made their way along the untended drive, noting

as they went the thick undergrowth and tangle of unmown grass that fringed it. Suddenly a bend brought them in sight of an ancient ivy-clad mansion, embowered in trees,—picturesque enough, but suggestive of damp and decay.

"Scott! but that's a pretty crib to ask a chap to live in," exclaimed Hooligan, eyeing the gloomy pile askance. "I shall want a drayful of liquor to make me cosy there."

"You shan't be thirsty," said Tannadyce drily. "And you'll find this nicer than London—with Mr. Inspector Croal in an inquisitive mood."

By the great oak door an old-fashioned bell-chain hung, which evoked a distant jangle far away in the back of the house. Two minutes passed without any response, and Hooligan impatiently pulled the bell again, producing, after another minute's delay, an apparition so revolting that even the cold-blooded Tannadyce recoiled from it.

She who opened to them was no English-woman, but a yellow-skinned mulatto, with thick lips that failed to meet by reason of two blackened snags of teeth which protruded horribly, the one up, the other down, like the jaws of a rat-trap. A pair of beady black eyes, set close to the huge fleshy nose, smouldered with latent avarice and curiosity as she regarded her visitors. It was impossible to diagnose her age, but she could not have been less than sixty, notwithstanding the hale vigour noticeable in every movement of her powerful limbs.

Hooligan was too appalled by the terrible vision to speak, but Tannadyce quickly recovered himself and broached the nature of their business. "My friend Mr. Hooley wants to view the house," he said, nudging his companion to speak on his own behalf.

"I'm after a quiet place to—to write poetry in,"

blurted Hooligan, with an astounding effort of invention.

The woman looked from one to the other, incredulity and suspicion in her shining orbs, and then surprised them both by answering in a voice that was musical and well modulated. The deep rich tones might have been those of a prima donna rather than of a half-caste hag of forbidding appearance.

"Step in, gentlemen, please," she said in perfect English. "My master will be very glad to let, as he has to remain in the West Indies longer than he expected."

And as she led the way across the oak-panelled hall, dark and musty-odoured, she waxed voluble on the advantages of the house, shooting furtive glances at the two men as she expatiated on its solitude and distance from other habitations. Tannadyce did not fail to note how she made the most of the very qualities that had attracted him to the lonely mansion.

"Look here," he said, when she had shown the damp and gloomy rooms, full of mildewed, moth-eaten furniture, "you keep harping on Mr. Hooly's desire for a quiet retreat. There's nothing uncommon in a man wanting to lead a retired life for a while, is there?"

The mulatto ignored the question and turned to the subject of it, baring her horrible gums in a hideous grin. "It's pretty poetry you write, I expect—all about lovely woman and flowing bowls," she said in those strangely dulcet tones of hers.

"Something of the sort," growled Hooligan, irritated almost beyond endurance.

But Tannadyce broke into laughter, quite hearty for him. "She's sharp, this good lady," he chuckled, and turning to the woman he asked: "What is my

friend to call you, madam, in case he takes the house and becomes better acquainted.

"They used to call me Mother Fury in Jamaica, when I was landlady of a nice little crib the sailors used to lodge at," was the reply, accompanied by a knowing leer.

Tannadyce laughed again. "A very appropriate appellation, no doubt, and one that shows you're the sort of housekeeper Mr. Hooly is looking for. I'll tackle her, Hooly," he added. "She's the very one to make this a perfect little family party. Take a stroll in the grounds, will you, while I talk to her, but don't get lost in the bushes."

The interview between Tannadyce and the yellow crone lasted half an hour, and then the moneylender called Hooligan back into the mouldy hall.

"It's all settled," he said. "She's gone to get a room ready for you, for you're to stay here now. It would only be a risk for you to return to London, and I'll send Skinner down with your things and a plentiful supply of Hennessy's Three Star."

"When's the other payin' guest coming ?" asked Hooligan petulantly.

"She'll be here in a day or two—leave that to me. In the meanwhile I want the addresses of those two pugilistic gentlemen I had the pleasure of meeting at your diggings the other evening."

"What do you want with them ?" was the sullen rejoinder.

Tannadyce quelled the rising rebellion with a cold stare. "No nonsense," he said sharply. "First I require their assistance in convincing Miss Beauchamp of the advantages of country air at the Rook's Nest, and after that, Hooly, dear boy, I want them to form a bodyguard for you—in case of Croal, don't you know. You ought to forgive the beggars that *little turncoat* business, seeing how I tempted them."

"They'll do to play nap with," Hooligan growled. "Ted the Pounder hangs out at Great Stanmore Street, Battersea, and Brummagem Jem at Villiers Street. Only you'll have to send a wagon-load of liquor if that crowd's coming."

Assuring him that their creature comforts would be provided for, Tannadyce took his departure, but before he went he got Hooligan to write out an application to the agents for the house in the name of Hooly, promising to post it in London with three months' rent enclosed.

At the bend in the drive the moneylender turned and looked back at the sombre abode in which he had installed his henchman. For quite two minutes he stood there gazing, with a Sphinx-like smile at the corners of his mouth. Then he proceeded to the iron gates and there found the waiting fly.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE CONVENIENT BROUGHAM

THE morning after the assault on her father, Nance was early at the hospital to inquire for news, none having reached her from the authorities. But she had to come away again with a heavy heart, for the house-surgeon could only inform her that the old man was still in a deep stupor and that there were at present no indications of returning consciousness.

On reaching Beaker Street, after answering the anxious questions of sympathetic Mrs. Bremner, she went sadly to the little sitting-room to try and shape a definite plan for the future. She had fully determined that, even if her father were restored to health and vigour, "Parker's Lightning Finals" should never be resuscitated; so it was imperative that she should quickly find some other method of gaining a livelihood.

While she was debating whether to apply for a situation in a shop or to essay a bolder flight by trying for a secretaryship in the city, the house-bell rang violently, and Mrs. Bremner appeared a minute later in the doorway, flustered but smiling.

"Sir Charles Roylance has called to see you, Miss," was her startling announcement.

For a moment the room seemed to swim before the girl's eyes. This was what she had been dreading, yet hoping for—she hardly knew whether the fear or the hope was the strongest. Her first impulse was to refuse to see him, or at least to postpone the ordeal; but a better and wiser angel was at hand and told her that there had been enough of misunderstandings and false pride.

So the young baronet entered the room with outstretched hand and the ghost of a smile on a face that had grown haggard and careworn since Sunday.

"I saw it in the paper," he began lamely. "It was a dreadful blow, but I couldn't keep away. I—I came to see if I could be of any use."

The girl's bosom heaved, and in the glance that she shot at him there was rising indignation. She had suffered a good deal for her old playmate. "Was it a worse blow to discover that father and I were earning our daily bread as tipsters than to find that I was on speaking terms with Mr. Leopold Tannadyce?" she said, hardly knowing what she said.

"Is it possible that you are ignorant that that Jew scoundrel is the man who threatens to foreclose on Roylance Abbey?" he exclaimed, struck by the innocence of her manner. His impulsive visit that morning was pure chivalry, for the discovery from the newspaper paragraph that she was, after all, "the girl from Parker's" had seemed to furnish an ominous reason for her friendship with Tannadyce.

And her face and her voice told him now that at least Tannadyce's position with regard to himself was news to her. "What!" she exclaimed; "is that the man who holds the mortgages? Oh, if you had only mentioned his name to me on Sunday I should have been spared the shame of being inveigled into that awful place. Sit down while I tell

you everything, and may heaven forgive me for not having the courage to tell you before."

"One moment," said Sir Charles hoarsely. "You were not aware of the infamous character of the club he took you to?"

"Oh, Charley! you knew of that, and have been believing that I went there wittingly," Nance faltered, and there was a world of reproach in her tone.

"I hurried to town to see what had become of you, and the first thing I saw at Waterloo was Tannadyce putting you into a cab," Roylance replied. "Knowing the fellow's reputation, I followed on the chance of being of service to you, and so saw you enter the club. You must forgive me, Nance, if my faith had been a little shaken by finding you on terms of intimacy with the man who is doing his best to ruin me."

"So you went back and told your aunt, Lady Alice, what you had seen," exclaimed Nance warmly.

"I am not quite such a sneak as that. No; my aunt was made aware who Tannadyce was, and was pained at your going off with him; but I bore my secret about the club alone."

The girl sat for a moment looking down in silence, then broke into a strained laugh. "Things must have looked terribly bad against me without that, I admit; but it was my own fault for not throwing myself on your mercy sooner," she said. "Perhaps you will forgive me a little when you hear all."

And then, bravely fighting back the tears, she told him all—all, at least, except her suspicions of Lord Hooligan in connection with the murder, which, with fateful consequences to herself, she reserved for a future occasion. Just at the moment it seemed a small matter compared with setting herself right in Charles's eyes, and she confined her narrative to the affairs of "Parker's Lightning Finals."

She told how her father had first entered into the petty business; how, when they had been on the brink of failure, they had taken a partner who must have been a mere agent or nominee of Tannadyce; how that partner had insisted on the "booming" of Starlight; and how she had done her best to counteract the mischief by suppressing the circular and sending out the one of her own concoction.

She touched lightly on what she had hitherto believed was Tannadyce's timely assistance in "a little trouble at the office," only mentioning it to show why she had consented to go to London with him in the launch rather than let him land her and expose her connection with "Parker's."

"I can see it all so plainly now," she concluded her pathetic little story. "Mr. Tannadyce had fished it out of me that I had been a neighbour of yours in the country. In order to prevent me from defeating his vile project he played on my shame at being a tipster, so that I might not confess to you. Oh, Charley—a tipster; think of it! And think of Beauchamp Grange!"

The long strain of the past two weeks had snapped, and she broke into incoherent sobs. But her lover was at her side in an instant, protesting, consoling. His firm hand seized hers; his healthy, sun-tanned face was very close.

"If you see it all plainly, little Nance, I see it plainer still," he exclaimed. "You have behaved like a heroine, and I don't blame you or Mr. Beauchamp a bit. You were both doing what you thought right. Nance, darling, I was going to say it a fortnight ago when something hindered—will you be my wife? I have nothing but my love to offer you, unless Starlight wins, and even then there'll be only a bare pittance, which I shall owe to you."

"A bare pittance and you, Charley, is all I want,"

the girl murmured, as she yielded to her lover's first embrace.

So they pledged their troth, these two who had been undeclared sweethearts so long, and time sped all unheeded till Mary Bremner came in to lay Nance's modest meal. It was the signal for Sir Charles's departure, but he promised to come again very soon, and in the meanwhile he begged Nance to wire him at once if there was any change in her father's condition. It was not till he had gone that Nance remembered that in her absorbing happiness she had quite forgotten to consult him as to the course she ought to pursue with regard to Lord Hooligan, and her suspicions of the ruffian peer.

However, the glad thought remained that she would soon have another opportunity, and all that day and the next she trod on air, exalted by the sudden revulsion from despair to sweet expectancy. In the first shock of her misery after the outrage on Mr. Beauchamp, when the publicity in the papers made it necessary to explain matters to Mrs. Bremner, she had also confided the trying position she had been placed in with regard to Sir Charles Roylance and his horse. Now it was her glad privilege to receive her kind landlady's congratulations on the passing of the cloud.

Mary Bremner, of course, told her husband, and the lawyer's clerk fully shared his wife's pleasure at the happiness of the fair girl who had befriended them in their distress. But on the second evening after Sir Charles's call, Bremner brought Tidmarsh home with him, and both men were looking serious and uneasy. Mr. Tidmarsh had been fined £20 that morning as the result of the raid, but it soon became apparent that his gravity was not due to that.

"Mary, do you think Miss Beauchamp would see Mr. Tidmarsh?" Bremner said nervously. "He

has got some information affecting Sir Charles Roylance. He has told it to me, under promise of my not saying anything myself, and I certainly think she ought to know."

"Fair exchange is no robbery, ma'am," said Tidmarsh sheepishly. "I'm no blackmailer, but I think the young lady can do me a turn. And, mind you, I know she's a proper good sort. I shan't be rough with her."

Mrs. Bremner summed him up with a shrewd, womanly glance, and consented to take up the message. So it was that the big bookmaker made an awkward entrance into the little parlour and stood shyly fingering his hat before the occupant of the room.

"You have no bad news of Sir Charles—he has not met with an accident?" asked Nance anxiously.

"No, miss; it ain't so bad as that," Tidmarsh replied. "But there's a chap that's getting up a nasty one for him—party of the name of Tannadyce."

"Oh, but this is kind of you, Mr. Tidmarsh. Pray, tell me," cried Nance, clasping her hands.

"That's what I'm here for, Miss; but—but," stammered Tidmarsh, "it's against the grain to drive a bargain with you. I—I want something off you in return. Not that," he flashed out briskly, as Nance produced her purse. "It's news for news I want."

"News?" repeated Nance, puzzled, yet half attracted, by the huge mountain of humanity.

"I'm the brother of the person—Bessie Beckford, of the 'alls—as was murdered on Epsom Downs the day Starlight was tried," proceeded the bookmaker. "In a roundabout way I've found that you know something. Now can't we do a deal?"

Nance turned pale. She dared not set this vengeful man in motion on mere surmise without con-

sulting her lover, who, she now saw, would be a witness if the case went to trial.

"I was on the Downs that morning, and I did see something in the gorse-bushes, though I did not know there was anything wrong at the time," she admitted. "I will gladly help you—if I may ask Sir Charles Roylance first."

"When might you be going to see Sir Charles?" Mr. Tidmarsh inquired.

Nance answered that she had had a letter from him saying that he was going to call next day.

"Very well, here goes!" exclaimed the bookmaker impetuously. "The baronite's a sportsman and a gentleman, and I'll take you both on trust. When Sir Charles comes you tell him that Tannadyce means to distrain on Starlight next Tuesday, the night before the race. He's got judgment against Sir Charles on a stray debt of £5,000, and he's going to collar the horse, so as it can't run and win a big stake. I heard something in lawyer Nathan's office, where Bremner works, and we have put our heads together, and that's how it figures out."

Nance seized the bookmaker's great hand and wrung it hard. "A thousand thanks!" she cried. "I think with your warning we shall be able to defeat Mr. Tannadyce, and I am sure, when I have consulted Sir Charles to-morrow, that I shall be able to unseal my lips to you about that morning."

So Mr. Tidmarsh departed, well pleased at having stolen a march on Inspector Croal. After he had gone, Nance sat in the gloaming and thought over the last move of the dastard enemy. At nine o'clock she rang the bell and asked Mrs. Bremner to request her husband to step up.

"Mr. Bremner, I cannot be too grateful to you and Mr. Tidmarsh—especially as you must be risking your situation in warning us," said Nance.

"Well, Nathans would chuck me if they knew I'd divulged a client's business," replied Frank rather ruefully. "I'm the clerk that's got to distrain the horse—at ten o'clock the night before the race, so as to give Sir Charles no time to raise the wind to pay out the claim."

Nance laughed gaily. "Do your duty to your employers and take Starlight away," she said. "I'll engage that Mr. Tannadyce shall not win the game. You thoroughly understand that. Put in the execution and seize the horse. I'll attend to the rest."

Bremner was readily assenting to a course which relieved him from responsibility when his wife entered hurriedly.

"Your father has taken a turn for the worse, Miss Beauchamp, and the doctors think you ought to go to the hospital at once," she announced. "There was a private brougham there, belonging to one of the head surgeons, and he sent it on with the news. The coachman says he's to wait and bring you back if you care to use the carriage."

"Tell him I'll be ready in a minute," Nance exclaimed, running for her hat. "How thoughtful of the surgeon!"

## CHAPTER XXV

### "BOX NUMBER TEN"

MR. TOM BARRON, the celebrated Epsom trainer, had enjoyed his early dinner and was sitting on the verandah of his comfortable house on the slope of the Downs, sipping his post-prandial allowance of well-diluted whisky and water.

The verandah abutted on the stable yard and looked towards the high wall in which were set the entrance gates; on either hand, forming two sides of the square, ran the ranges of stabling in which Mr. Barron's equine charges were taking their midday rest.

The trainer was well pleased with himself and all the world, for he had never felt more certain of pulling off a great coup than with Starlight in the New Century Handicap at Sandown Park the following week. He was doubly glad of this, because of all the owners for whom he trained Sir Charles Roylance was his favourite, and he was aware, without knowing details, that the popular young baronet was in embarrassed circumstances. Moreover, he stood to make a good sum on the colt himself. In spite of the first mysterious elevation of the horse to the position of favourite, he had taken full advantage of the subsequent fall in the betting.

"The race is as good as over; there's nothing in

the same street with my chestnut beauty," he muttered between the puffs of his cigar, as he lazily contemplated the peaceful yard. There was no one about but a stable-boy filling buckets at the pump in the centre, and no sound but the occasional ring of an iron-shod hoof or the rattle of a headstall in the stables.

Suddenly Mr. Barron raised himself slightly and became all alert attention. A man had appeared between the rails of the great gates. He tried the latch without result, for it was a strict rule of the sternly disciplined establishment that the gates should be kept locked and no strangers admitted without the master's authority.

Failing to effect an entrance the man found the bell and rang it. The stable-boy put down the buckets, and after a brief parley through the gate approached the trainer.

"Chap after a job, sir," he said with a touch of his forelock.

It happened that Mr. Barron was short-handed, and he gave orders for the admission of the applicant, watching the latter with a critical eye as he crossed the yard. The man's gait and the way he wore his threadbare but horsy clothes left no doubt as to his calling. Whatever his character might be, he was clearly on familiar terms with the noble quadruped.

"Well, my lad; what is it?" Mr. Barron asked sharply. He was a kind-hearted, bluff man, but he believed in keeping his "helps" in their places.

"Thought you might find a billet for me, sir," was the reply. "I'm out of collar six weeks now, and I'd do any work you might put me to—cleaning or anything. I'm too heavy to ride racehorses at exercise."

"So I see. Been in a racing stable before?"

"No, sir; private service."

"Well, I've got room for a handy man that knows horses. Let's see your testimonials."

But that was just what the applicant could not do. He explained that for lack of money he had tramped from London, and did not care to carry about his precious references on such a doubtful expedition. He could, however, go back and fetch them, and return the following day. He was certain that they would prove satisfactory.

"Oh, of course you're an unfledged angel, my lad; any one can see that with half an eye," replied Mr. Barron drily. Nevertheless, he rather liked the look of the trim-built, clean-shaven young fellow, who did not whine or waste unnecessary words, and he consented to keep the place open for him till the morrow, when, if his character was vouched for, he would engage him as a stable-help.

"What's your name?" the trainer asked, as the door behind him opened, and a neat servant-maid came out of the house on to the verandah, bearing a telegram on a tray, which she presented to her master.

"Fred Bolton, sir," the applicant replied smartly, without at first paying any attention to the maid. Mr. Barron's gaze was on him, and he guessed that a roving eye for the fair sex would imperil his chances.

But though he did not look at once at the girl, she looked at him, and started and changed colour. And the moment he spoke his name her colour grew deeper still, and she sidled closer to him, and so stood, trying to attract his attention, while Mr. Barron perused the telegram and pencilled a reply. Her overtures were so unmistakable that the prospective stableman stole an angry glance at her, and whispered almost inaudibly:

"Keep away, can't you."

It was the maid's turn to look angry now—so angry that she appeared to be on the point of an outspoken retort, when the trainer finished writing the reply, and bade her give it to the messenger with all speed.

"Well, my lad, that's all, I think," he said, perceiving the applicant still waiting. "Come back to-morrow."

But Mr. Fred Bolton hesitated. "Beg pardon, sir, if I make too bold, but I always take a pleasure in my work. My testimonials are all right. It's a sure thing you'll engage me when you see them. I should be so proud to see the cracks I'm to help tend."

Mr. Barron fancied himself a judge of human nature, and he thought he detected the genuine ring of disinterested devotion to duty in the request. He rose and flicked the ash off his cigar.

"Come along, then," he said, "I'll show you round myself." At the same time he chuckled inwardly at the notion that, if by any chance this extremely promising young man should have cherished the evil design of being sent round with a subordinate whom he could pump, he had defeated it by escorting him personally.

He led the way to the right-hand stable first, and, possibly inspired by his modest whisky, waxed bluntly eloquent on the identity and past performances, but *not* on the future prospects, of the occupants of the loose boxes. Bolton listened respectfully, touching his cap freely, but without comment. Then Mr. Barron strutted across to the opposite range.

"There's some horses in the building that have made history, and some that are going to make it," he said proudly, as he passed into the cool, well-

ventilated interior, "neat but not gaudy," with its panelling of white Doulton tiles, all spotlessly clean. One or two of the grand creatures whinnied in friendly greeting to their schoolmaster, as he translated the numbers into names for the benefit of his companion.

"Number 10—Starlight—owned by Sir Charles Roylance," he announced, coming to the loose box furthest from the door and stealing at the same time an inquiring glance at the new man's face.

But the face was quite expressionless. Bolton merely clawed at his cap-peak again, staring stolidly at the splendid chestnut with the white star, and Mr. Barron brought the exhibition to a close with a shrug of mingled disappointment and satisfaction.

"The chap isn't interested in the betting market, anyhow," he thought, "and he's none the worse for that. Funny, though, that a horse that's made such a stir didn't move him."

The trainer escorted the applicant to the gates, bade him good-day, and returned to his chair on the verandah. He had not been there a minute when the maid came out of the house and approached him timidly.

"What is it, Lizzie, my girl?" he asked in some surprise, for though she had only been in his service a week, he had noticed that shyness was not her strong point.

"That young man, sir, who's just gone," she began. "I'm afraid he's a precious bad one. He was giving you his name just as I stepped out with the telegram, and he gave you a false one."

"What!" roared the trainer. "You know him?"

"Yes, sir; he was in the mews at the back of where I lived in my last situation, and his name was Alf Skinner then," Miss Lizzie replied with a toss of

her head. The fact was that she had set her cap at the smart young groom without eliciting any response and was not sorry for an opportunity of getting square on him.

"He told me he had been out of collar six weeks," said Mr. Barron.

"He was in his situation ten days ago, sir, for I saw him with his livery on, driving his private hansom into the mews," the maid replied.

Thanking the girl for her information, Mr. Barron registered a mental vow to send the man of two names about his business if he came back on the morrow. But Mr. Alfred Skinner did not come back, and the trainer had to comfort himself with the reflection that the bogus applicant had not come into contact with any of his underlings or been left alone for the fraction of a second while within the sacred precincts of the stable yard.

But we, who have had the privilege of seeing Skinner receive his instructions from Mr. Leopold Tannadyce, are aware that there was something brewing undreamed of in the philosophy of this astutest of trainers. His mind was running on information extracted from venial "lads" about the weights in the last trial—possibly on a pinch of poison introduced into a bucket of water. Whereas the trick had been done the moment Mr. Tom Barron himself translated the blue enamelled figure 10 over a certain loose box into the simple words:

"Starlight, owned by Sir Charles Roylance."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### FLOWN OR ENSNARED ?

AS a result of his meeting with the Reverend Mr. Quintree, and of his discovery that there had been a mysterious partner in " Parker's Lightning Finals," Mr. Inspector Croal was of opinion that he had whittled the inquiry into Bessie Beckford's death down to a very sharp point indeed.

He was convinced that the mysterious partner was the man he " wanted," and at present he had only two ways of finding him—one through the handwriting in the address-book, and the other by questioning Mr. Beauchamp. The grave view he took of Nance's complicity with the unknown partner precluded him from seeking information from the girl herself.

For some days after the assault Mr. Croal looked in at the hospital morning, noon, and night, in the hope that the injured man might have recovered consciousness; but he was always met with the same story—Mr. Beauchamp still lay in a comatose condition. This was doubly galling, because the inspector nourished a growing belief in his theory. He had caused a watch to be set on the office in Red Lion Court, and he had learned from his " shadows " that no one had been near it. This seemed to point to the guilt of " the coarse creature "

mentioned by Mr. Quintree—at any rate of the assault on Mr. Beauchamp. Otherwise he would surely have been attending to the business as usual.

Mr. Croal was not aware that he himself had frightened "the coarse creature" first through the skylight on to the roof, and finally away from the office altogether, some days before the outrage on the blind proprietor.

The inspector also took steps, personally or by deputy, to ascertain daily that Nance was still at her lodgings in Islington, though, needless to say, the occupants of Beaker Street were ignorant of the attention paid by him. Croal had not deemed it necessary to keep a constant watch on the house, but he got to know the times of Nance's visits to the hospital, and there was generally a subordinate in plain clothes to see her start on those occasions.

On the morning of the Saturday before the decision of the New Century Handicap, which was also the morning after Nance's summons to her father's bedside, Mr. Croal was not in the best of humours. He had paid his customary call at the hospital, and had met with the customary answer that Mr. Beauchamp was still insensible. His narrowing of the inquiry had so far borne no fruit, and he was waxing impatient.

He was busily engaged at New Scotland Yard, looking over the handwriting of convicted criminals in the hope that he might stumble on a clue, when the detective who had been on duty in Beaker Street came in hurriedly.

"She didn't leave the house for the hospital this morning, sir," he reported. "I waited half an hour past her usual time, too."

"Well," snapped Mr. Croal, "you didn't let it rest there, I suppose?"

"No, sir; I invented an excuse for going to the

door—made out I'd got a message for Miss Beauchamp from a milliner—but the landlady was very short with me. Shut the door in my face, and said the young lady was out," replied the man.

"Get back there and keep observation on the house, then," said Croal shortly. "It's more than likely I'll be along myself presently."

The subordinate having departed, the inspector glanced at the clock and saw that it was half-past eleven. Among other crumbs of information connected with the case, he had picked up the fact that Sir Charles Roylance was in the habit of coming up from Barfield-on-Thames to lunch at his club, the Junior Carlton, arriving about that hour. Then and there he decided to go and have a plain issue with the young baronet about Miss Beauchamp and see if he could throw any light on the identity of the mysterious partner.

Sir Charles drove up to the club just as the inspector was making inquiry for him of the hall porter, and at once invited him into one of the waiting-rooms.

"You are coming to gloat over me, I suppose, Croal, because you were right about Miss Beauchamp and the tipping office," said Sir Charles, who appeared to be in the highest spirits. "There's no secret between her and me about it any longer, so you're a day too late."

"It isn't my business to gloat," answered the inspector drily. "I came to ask you a few questions, if you don't mind. Are you aware that there was a partner in the so-called 'Parker's office?'"

"Yes; when we discussed the matter the night before last, Miss Beauchamp informed me that there was such a person—introduced, we think, by a gentleman whose interest it was to influence the betting market adversely to myself."

"Mr. Leopold Tannadyce, I presume?"

Roylance laughed heartily. "Really, inspector, but you've been very busy with my affairs, though I can't for the life of me see how they affect that case of yours," he replied. "Yes, I have no proof, but I should say most certainly that Tannadyce was the wirepuller who was behind the partner."

"Can you give me the man's name?" asked Croal eagerly.

"No, because I don't know it. Miss Beauchamp didn't mention it, all her concern at the moment being to explain certain action she had taken to thwart the fellow's machinations."

Mr. Croal was both puzzled and disappointed. There had evidently been a clearing of the atmosphere between the baronet and Miss Beauchamp as regards her interference in his racing affairs, but it was strange that it should include no reference to the weightier matter of the murder on the Downs. Could it be that the girl, driven to bay by the exposure of her calling, should have hoodwinked Sir Charles with only half a story?

"Sir Charles Roylance," said the detective very gravely, "I am going to take you into my confidence to a certain extent. I have reason to believe that the unknown partner in 'Parker's' was the murderer of the poor woman at Epsom; and I further believe that Miss Beauchamp was mixed up in it."

A quick flush mounted to the baronet's face at the imputation on the girl to whom he had plighted his troth, and for a moment it seemed that he was going to commit the egregious folly of striking a police-officer. But with a supreme effort he held himself in check, and haughtily demanded the inspector's reasons for arriving at such a preposterous conclusion.

Croal responded by lucidly and inexorably giving

a résumé of his investigations, dwelling on Nance's presence in the gorse-bushes, on the agreement between the descriptions he had obtained of the mysterious partner and of the brutal associate of Bessie Beckford at the *Angler's Rest*—above all, on Nance's concealment of her connexion with the suspected person.

Sir Charles heard him to the end, but with growing impatience. "My good man," he exclaimed at last, "you have been so steeped in the ways of sordid criminals that you are unable to appreciate the feelings of a delicately bred lady suddenly confronted, as she was that Sunday, with exposure as a tipster—a trade which she loathed, but bravely pursued at the instance of her silly old father. She was silent about this ruffian whom you suspect, because a very intelligible but unnecessary shame kept her silent about the miserable business in which she was engaged."

"What about her association with Tannadyce, your avowed enemy?" asked Croal, rather shaken by this vigorous championship.

"We have had all that out together, and I can assure you that she has been as staunch and true a friend to me as a man could wish to have," Sir Charles replied warmly. "If my horse is first past the post next Wednesday, the sum which I shall win, and which will save me from utter ruin, will be entirely due to Miss Beauchamp's devoted pluck in defeating as mean a plot as was ever hatched. And you may as well note that in any further references you may make to this young lady you are referring to my affianced wife."

The inspector pondered over this convulsion of human nature, with a single eye to the solution of his case. "I'll tell you what, Sir Charles," he said at length; "it's my duty to go and question Miss

Beauchamp, but if you care to come along I'll do it in your presence. I can't say fairer than that."

Nor could he, he was well aware, hit on a better plan for gaining the information he sought, for Nance would most certainly be more communicative in the presence of her lover than alone with a police-officer. Whether she would tell the truth was another matter, Croal cynically reflected, but he relied on his own acumen to sift the chaff from the grain if he could only get her to talk.

Sir Charles eagerly agreed, far too simple-minded and straightforward himself to discern anything but friendly good-nature in the detective's proposal. Besides, the plan struck him as the most effective way of scotching once for all the absurd theory that Nance was in any way implicated.

So it was that half an hour later he and the inspector knocked at the door of 40, Beaker Street, and were at once admitted by Mrs. Bremner, who had her hat and jacket on. The two men saw at once that something was very wrong. Her eyes were red with weeping, and her hands twitched nervously when Sir Charles asked for Miss Beauchamp.

"Come in, sir," said the good woman, opening the door of the little parlour hallowed in the baronet's memory by the tender scene of two days ago. "I am more than glad you've come," she added, as she followed them in. "I was just off to the police-station."

"Why, what on earth has happened? Where is Miss Beauchamp?" exclaimed Sir Charles, gazing wildly at her.

"That's what I can't tell you, sir," was the reply. "A brougham with two men in livery called last evening between nine and ten to take her to the hospital, with a message that her father was worse.

She didn't come home all night, and this morning I got anxious and went to the hospital. I'm just back, none the wiser for my journey. She's never been near the hospital, sir, and the people there say there must have been a hoax. Mr. Beauchamp remains about the same, and no message or carriage was sent to fetch his daughter."

Sir Charles turned a white, pleading face to the detective, whose eyes snapped fire at this intelligence. Was this the skilfully devised flight of a criminal, or was it the spiriting away by cruel force and cunning fraud of his principal witness? That was the question which Mr. Croal had to decide, and on the spur of the moment he decided it rightly.

"This is a bad job, Sir Charles," he said, "but I'll help you all I can. I must take back the remarks I made at your club just now, for it looks as if Miss Beauchamp were more sinned against than sinning. But my main contention is strengthened by this ruse of some one with whom she has come in contact to keep her out of the way."

"You mean that scoundrel foisted on to old Beauchamp by Tannadyce, but we are no nearer to him than before. How are you going to get at him? How are we going to begin?" Sir Charles cried hopelessly. And, breaking down, the owner of Starlight flung himself into a chair and burst into tears.

"I wish to heaven that my father had never left me the curse of a racing stable!" he groaned. "If it had not been for that millstone round my neck, this would not have happened!"

By no means had all the humanity been crushed out of Mr. Croal by the nature of his profession. He went and stood over the bereaved lover, and laid a kindly hand on his shoulder. "We shall get our line to the young lady through Tannadyce," he

soothed him. "I'll put a shadow on him at once, for he's sure to be in touch with the man I'm after."

But Inspector Croal was crossing swords with no ordinary antagonist. The "touch" he had hoped to get his clue from was just what Mr. Leopold Tannadyce had been at particular pains to cut off entirely.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### "MOTHER FURY" IS BUSY

ON the evening when Nance's interview with Mr. Tidmarsh was followed by the summons to the hospital, a stir prevailed at the secluded mansion between Mitcham and Carshalton.

It commenced with the arrival of a telegram addressed to Mrs. Johnson—as the mulatto woman who called herself Mother Fury was known locally to the few people who were aware of her existence. The Rook's Nest stood so far back from the road amid its jungle of trees that it was not generally known that the house was occupied by a caretaker. Still less was it known that a tenant rented the place, and that the caretaker's status was changed into that of a housekeeper.

On receipt of the telegram, which came about dusk, the yellow hag took it into the dank, evil-smelling dining-room. By an open French window Lord Hooligan was lounging in an easy chair moodily smoking, with, of course, the usual accessory of a brandy bottle at his elbow. Tannadyce had kept his word in that respect. Earlier in the day the lonely house had been victualled as though for a state of siege, and liquids of a fiery nature had been freely supplied.

The consignment of stores had been sent by road from London, so that there had been no need for provoking local gossip or curiosity.

"They're coming," said the woman, handing Hooligan the telegram for perusal. It had been dispatched from Charing Cross post-office at seven o'clock, and, without any signature, ran thus:

"*Expect them to-night about eleven.*"

"Good biz!" exclaimed his lordship, rising and stretching himself. "I am just about ripe for a good spree after a day and a half of this old dungeon. And, talking of dungeons," he added with a coarse laugh, "where are you going to stow the gal?"

"Come and see," said Mother Fury, and her nominal master followed her out into the hall. It was not yet dark, but the house was so overhung with branching trees that it was necessary to light a candle. This done, she led the way upstairs to a landing on which were the principal bedrooms, but passing these, she turned into a passage leading to what must have been the servants' quarters over the kitchen premises when the establishment had been properly kept up.

"There's the bird-cage," said the woman, leering horribly as she opened the door of a room. "Bars and all, you see."

Lord Hooligan did see, and the sight evoked a burst of vinous laughter. The room was a small one, furnished in the barest style, and the barred window testified to its former use as the butler's bedroom, where the plate-chest was kept at night. Everything was ancient and very frowsy, except a brand-new lock on the age-blackened oak door.

"Keep her tight, eh?" grinned the mulatto.

"Yes, but who's going to keep the key?" replied Hooligan with a responsive grin.

"Mr. —— the gentleman said I was to do that,"

said the woman, and there was a tinge of anxiety in her tone which her companion was too amused to notice.

"That's all right," he laughed hoarsely. "You lend things sometimes, I expect, Mother Fury."

He advanced to the window and looked through the bars, the woman following close at his heels with the lighted candle. Here at the back the growth of trees and bushes was even denser than at the front of the house, and the range of vision was confined to a small flagged yard on which abutted sheds for coal and knife-cleaning—all ivy-clad and dilapidated.

Suddenly Hooligan withdrew into the room and blew out the candle which the mulatto was carrying.

"There's some one down there in the yard. I caught his eye looking up from the door of one of those sheds," he gurgled in a whisper.

"We must see who it is, then. They'll be here in less than two hours," said Mother Fury briskly. "Come with me. I'll show you a short way down. No need to go round by the front door."

Hooligan groped his way down a flight of back stairs, and followed through stone-paved sculleries and offices to a door, which she silently unbolted. The candle had not been relit, but she now fumbled for the match-box.

"I'm going to open the door," she whispered. "You cut out and collar him—you're strong enough for most—and bring him in. I shan't light up till you've made sure."

She gently slid the door back, and Hooligan hurtled through it into the courtyard, making straight for the outhouse where he had seen the apparition. There was a brief scuffle, a blood-curdling oath from the peer, and a frightened squeal.

"I've got him," cried Hooligan, dragging a limp slip of humanity across the slimy flagstones.

Mother Fury's match flared up, and the candle shone upon a little shrivelled old man, quaking all over, and with every feature of hir terrified countenance proclaiming him a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

Hooligan hauled the terrified old Jew into the house, and Mother Fury shut the heavy door with a clang that reverberated through the empty passages.

"What are you mouching about here for?" asked the captor, shaking his prisoner as a terrier does a rat.

"May heaven help me! but I was only sheltering in the shed—to sleep there," faltered the shrunken atomy.

"Only a tramp, eh? What's best to do with him—put him under the pump and then run him out into the road?" suggested Holligan.

But the mulatto woman did not fall in with that proposal. Her coal-black eyes were searching the trespasser's pinched, grey face with keen scrutiny, and travelled downwards to the ragged alpaca overcoat that covered his thinly clad form.

"What's your name?" she inquired of the trembling wretch.

"Moses Cohen," was the reply, uttered through chattering teeth.

The yellow woman shook her hideous head, and turned to Lord Hooligan. "'Twon't do to let him go," she said. "I'm not quite so sure about my gentleman being a casual tramp. Anyhow, we'll be on the safe side and keep him, now we've got him. But we won't treat him any worse than by his own account he was going to treat himself, and in the coal-shed he shall sleep—with two additions to his own programme, some supper and a stout padlock on the door."

"Oh, don't shut me up, lady. I'll promise to go hence and never return," the old man pleaded.

But she was inexorable, and Hooligan, who was always ready to adopt the more brutal course, agreed that her plan was best. Moses Cohen was taken out into the yard again, and thrust, whining and protesting, into the coal-shed, where he was locked up, after being supplied with some sacks to sleep on and a leg-of-mutton bone to gnaw.

"I s'pose it's all right," said Hooligan, as he and the housekeeper retired into the house, "but won't he be a bit of a nuisance afterwards—if there's any larks here? As a witness, I mean."

The coloured hag laughed the musical laugh which was in such weird contrast to her repulsive ugliness. "There isn't always any 'afterwards' for people who get in the way," she replied.

She was rebolting the back door as she spoke, and she turned to look at Hooligan strangely, as though to emphasize some hidden meaning in the remark. He started and flushed under that shrewd survey. Even to his hardened soul it came as a shock to find that he was a kindred spirit with this dreadful creature of the yellow skin and protruding snags of teeth.

"By heaven! you're a fair caution," he sniggered, but there was a gruesome lack of life in his hilarity. In fact the mulatto's hint had such a depressing effect on him that he made his way back to the dining-room and the brandy bottle. There comes a time when methods of violence pall on the most violent, and that time had come to the ninth Baron Hooligan of Hooligan. His nerve was not what it had been when he——but no matter.

He sat in the dark at the open French window, smoking and drinking till long after the darkness of night had blended with the darkness of foliage to

wrap the mouldering house in an inky pall. It was a starless and moonless sultry night, the sky being covered with threatening storm-clouds, against which now and again the flicker of summer lightning played.

At eleven o'clock Hooligan rang for the lamps to be lit, and then he and Mother Fury went and stood in the porch listening for the sound of wheels. The rusty hinges of the iron gates had been oiled, so that it was now possible for a carriage to drive right up to the front door.

"There it is; I heard the gravel crunch," said the woman at last.

"I didn't hear anything," replied Hooligan.

"Bah! You've got the brandy-buz in your ears," the mulatto sneered. "I was right, you see. There come the carriage lamps round the bend."

A minute later a brougham and pair pulled up under the portico, and, jumping down from the box, the driver hailed Hooligan with a boisterous greeting—

"Cheeroh, Hooly! Here's the whole outfit, you see."

With which he opened the carriage door and assisted another man, who was inside, to lift the inanimate form of Nance Beauchamp into the hall.

"Ted had to give her the chloroform sponge," the coachman explained. He was none other than that extinguished light of the pugilistic world, Brummagem Jem.

"My eyes, yes," agreed Ted the Pounder. "When I became an inside passenger, and she found the 'orspital wasn't where we were bound for, she fought like a proper little cat, and screamed fearful. If it hadn't been for the racket in the Strand, which we was passing through, there'd have been trouble with the police."

"She's coming to," said Mother Fury, stooping her loathsome face over the pallid features, into which a faint flush was returning. "Hoist her up, one of you, and I'll pilot the way to her room."

"All the conveniences of a first-class hotel, eh, Hooly?" said Brummagen Jem, when he had watched his mate carry the light burden to the landing. "Now show us the stables, and then, when we've put the horses to bed, show us some drink."

And the peer of England assented with alacrity. There was the prospect of a "good time" again—with boon companions to his taste.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

ABOUT the time that Sir Charles Roylance and Mr. Inspector Croal were being apprised by Mrs. Bremner of Nance's disappearance, Tannadyce sat in the private room of his offices, in close conference with his satellite Skinner.

"You are quite certain," he was saying, "that the fellows carried out instructions to the letter? There is no doubt that the brougham reached the Rook's Nest without any fuss?"

"Quite certain, sir; I was hid in the bushes by the entrance gates when they drove in," was the reply.

"Good! Well, now I have another commission for you which ought to be congenial, for it is directed to at once and for all suppressing Lord Hooligan without the unpleasant consequences to ourselves which would ensue if he were arrested."

"I'd do pretty nigh anything to get quit of the brute," said the groom. "I've never had a moment's peace of mind since——"

"Since the discovery of that body on the Downs," Tannadyce helped him out. "I can understand that it is not nice to feel that you had driven his lordship down on that occasion, but there is a more

serious view of the case, Skinner. If Hooligan is ever brought to trial it will all come out—he is just the cur to confess it out of spite —that you, at my instigation, acted as the bogus registrar who was supposed to have married him to Bessie Beckford."

"It was rough of you to make me do that, sir," said the groom with a shade of resentment.

"Unfortunately, it was unavoidable in the interests of my business," the money-lender retorted coolly. "If Lord Hooligan had not been disposed of in that manner just then for a few months, he would have been annexed by an American heiress who I knew was after his title, and his liabilities to me would have been discharged—whereas foreclosure on the remains of his estate paid me better. I explain this to you, not because I am compelled to do so, but because you have served me faithfully."

"What is it I am to do now—cut his lordship's throat?" asked Skinner with unwonted warmth. "Because I'll tell you straight, sir, that it isn't a job I'm taking on. I'll do anything in reason, but you mustn't ask me to break the law again."

Tannadyce laughed soothingly, and bade his faithful follower keep an easy mind. The task before him was not in the least formidable and entailed no breach of the peace. It merely consisted in cultivating friendly relations with the brother of the murdered woman, and of finally hinting to him that he could indicate not necessarily the guilty party, but the man who ran off with Bessie Beckford.

"I know the brother to speak to, sir—Tidmarsh his name is," replied the groom. "You'll remember I came across him in a pub at Islington the day I followed the young lady from Fleet Street for you. He knows I'm in your service, too, I think, from that *clerk* at Nathan's."

Tannadyce drew figures on his blotting-pad in deep meditation. "That need make no difference," he said presently. "In fact, it is an advantage, as it will lend colour to my ultimate dealings with Mr. Tidmarsh. For you must be very careful only to excite him and sound him as yet. Mr. Nathan, who defended him in a police-court case yesterday, informs me that he is very bitter against the slayer of his sister, and I want you to find out to what lengths he would be likely to go if he could lay his hand on the man."

"I'm not to mention Lord Hooligan or Miss Beauchamp or the Rook's Nest?"

"Not by name, my dear Skinner, only by innuendo. I will enlighten him more fully when you have ascertained his frame of mind," Tannadyce replied suavely. "Pose as a bag of mystery that may be induced to open after further consideration, and make another appointment with him for that purpose on Monday. Stay, though; I had forgotten the utility of this clerk of Nathan's—Bremner is his name, isn't it? Well, you may drop a hint, especially if Bremner is in the company of Tidmarsh when you tackle him, that Miss Beauchamp has run away voluntarily to the gentleman who at one time showed a preference for Tidmarsh's sister. That is only a slight stretching of the truth, and need not trouble that sensitive conscience of yours, Skinner, eh?"

The servant knew his master's playful mood, and read the deadly purpose underlying that bland smoothness. Up in a Norfolk village there was an old "goody," going to church on Sundays in a red cloak, who was the mother of this smart London groom, and owed her snug cottage and comfortable life to her son's remittances. That was the secret of the steady, silent young man's devotion to a

service which he hated—the postal orders which he remitted monthly from Babylon the Great to that quiet haven on the Eastern coast.

"I see what is required, sir. Mr. Tidmarsh is the tiger who is to devour the jackal," said Skinner, allowing himself an unusual latitude of speech. "I will get up to the *Union Jack* at once."

Tannadyce nodded dismissal, and smiled darkly when his minion had departed. He knew nothing of the old woman in Norfolk, but he knew that some hidden chain of mutual interest bound this young man to him, and he meant to avail himself fully of the bond.

"That's a lucky chance that the fair Nance's landlord should happen to be a friend of Tidmarsh," he muttered. "The worthy bookmaker, when he has been properly stuffed by Skinner, may be trusted to pass on his news to Bremner, who, in turn, will pass it on to Sir Charles—if that constant lover makes inquiries for his lady love. She'll find it hard work to substantiate her version of the story in face of preconceived ideas."

He rose from his chair and walked across the thick pile carpet to one of the handsome windows overlooking the broadening thoroughfare. The afternoon traffic was at its height, and the moneylender stood gazing meditatively at the crowds of fashionably dressed people streaming afoot and in carriages up to Regent Street—so many of them his prey.

Suddenly his brows contracted, and he fell back a pace behind the curtains as his gaze settled on a hansom that had just set down two fares on the opposite side of the way. One was Sir Charles Roylance, the other was Mr. Inspector Croal.

"Those two in combination, eh? Croal has been quick—very quick," Tannadyce murmured softly to himself. "Fortunately that had been

foreseen and is provided for, but it is as well to be aware of it. The knowledge that Croal is on the right scent consoles me that I haven't taken a lot of trouble for nothing. Ah, they seem to be at loggerheads. What now, I wonder ? "

For Croal had laid a restraining hand on the baronet's arm and a heated discussion seemed to be taking place. Then Sir Charles, flushed and excited, broke away and crossed the road towards the offices, leaving the inspector planted on the kerb-stone and evidently in two minds whether to follow or not. Tannadyce waited long enough behind the curtain to see Croal walk rapidly away in the direction of New Scotland Yard, and seated himself at his table in time to rise and bow courteously as his page announced Sir Charles Roylance.

Sir Charles entered with an air of haughty hostility. " No, Mr. Tannadyce, I don't shake hands with you," he said, avoiding the jewel-encrusted" fingers extended to him. " Not, at least, till you have given a straight answer to a straight question. Do you know where Miss Nance Beauchamp is ? "

" Miss Beauchamp ? " the usurer repeated, puckering his brows. " Ah, of course, pardon me—you refer to the young lady whom till quite recently I knew as Miss Parker, of the ' Lightning Finals ' in Red Lion Court. No, I have not the slightest idea where she is—unless she is at her lodging in Islington. I believe their business premises have been shut up since the attack on the old man the other day."

" You admit, then, that you know Miss Beauchamp, and her connexion with that wretched business ? " said Sir Charles, taken aback by the other's cool impudence.

" Why shouldn't I ? " Tannadyce smiled. " It is permitted even to one of my profession to admire

a pretty woman, I suppose. But why this tone, Sir Charles?" he added with a quick change of manner. "Won't you sit down and be amicable? When you came in just now, I was under the impression that you wanted to pay out that little judgment of £10,000 that I have obtained against you—or possibly to give notice of the redemption of the mortgages. I had no idea we were rivals in a hopeless cause. There is really no reason why we should quarrel about Miss Parker—I beg your pardon, Miss Beauchamp—because I fear we have both been outpaced by an outsider in the favours of the fair lady."

Black as a thundercloud grew the baronet's boyish face. He believed this man was lying, but he could not pin him to the lie through all these plausible admissions. If he had been of the Lord Hooligan type, he would have taken him by the throat and strangled him, but, curbing the impulse, he forced himself to put the question—

"Then you deny all knowledge of Miss Beauchamp having been lured from her lodging last night by a false message from the hospital about her father?"

"Is she missing from her lodging?" said Tannadyce, and his tone of semi-indifferent annoyance was masterly. "Well, on the whole, I am not surprised. I could make no headway with the girl—owing, I thought, to a predilection for some young fellow who was her father's partner."

"That is a base calumny, on a par with your scoundrelly conduct in sending that same fellow into their office to spoil my market," the baronet retorted, white with anger. "Miss Beauchamp is not the sort to intrigue with any of *your* parasites."

Tannadyce smiled the smile that is in itself an exasperation. "Really, Sir Charles, you are going

a little too far," he protested with careless tolerance. "Did she confide to you the name of this man whom you accuse me of introducing into 'Parker's Lightning Finals'? Because, if so, I should be vastly obliged if you would give it to me."

Sir Charles was too agitated to perceive that under the apparent insolence of the question there lay a real desire to ascertain if Nance had divulged the mysterious partner's name. Too agitated also was he to note the gleam of relief which shone in the usurer's eyes at his scornful denial of all knowledge of the partner's name.

"Miss Beauchamp didn't think it worth while to soil her lips with the brute's name, and that alone is proof of the falseness of your vile insinuation," he exclaimed. And then, realizing the futility of pursuing his quest in this headquarters of deceit, he turned on his heel, but paused at the door to fling back at his enemy the quivering taunt; "I cannot hold my own with such as you, thank heaven, in tongue-work, but there is another way of dragging to light the secrets of guilty men. Night and day henceforth, till Miss Beauchamp is found, you will be watched by the police, so that if you know where she is you won't be able to go to her without giving us our clue. Wherever you eat or drink or sleep there will be a detective at hand to note exactly where you go, what you do, and with whom you consort. It will even be known from whom you receive letters and telegrams. You will be living in a house of glass, Mr. Leopold Tannadyce, till this matter is cleared up."

"Is that so?" sneered the moneylender. "I saw you getting out of a cab with Inspector Croal just now, and I gathered from his manner that he thought you wrong in coming to see me. Any-

how, give him my compliments, and tell him that if he likes to waste his time he will find a man with an easy conscience a very easy man to shadow. About dinner-time I am generally to be found at my restaurant in the Strand, and I invariably wind up at the Razzle Dazzle Club. Good-bye, Sir Charles, and a better temper to you."

When his harassed victim had finally disappeared, Tannadyce leaned back in his chair and grinned.

"That last shot about the Razzle Dazzle Club will hurt," he chuckled. "And this shadowing business bids fair to be amusing, since I have isolated the Rook's Nest as effectually as a small-pox hospital—till I give the word."

He rose once more to gaze abstractedly from the window, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, jingling the golden coins.

"And that word must be given not later than Monday, for I cannot expect Mother Fury to control that crowd longer than that," he muttered presently. "Then matters should come to a head on Tuesday night at both places. Nathan's people will collar Starlight at Epsom, and—well, there'll be the devil to pay at the Rook's Nest."

## CHAPTER XXIX

### IN DANGEROUS MOOD

WHEN Frank Bremner returned home on the evening of the day of Sir Charles Roylance and Mr. Croal's call at his house he found his wife depressed and miserable—a state of mind which the lawyer's clerk shared to the full when he heard that there was no news of their young lodger. "And a little after Sir Charles and the other gentleman had gone away, Mr. Tidmarsh called," Mrs. Bremner concluded her narrative. "He was mightily put out when he found he couldn't see Miss Beauchamp. He didn't say much then, but he came back half an hour ago raving like a madman about the poor girl. I couldn't make head nor tail of it, but he wants you to go round to the *Union Jack* as soon as you've had your tea."

A little later, when Bremner entered the saloon bar of the *Union Jack*, he was struck at once by the change in his old friend's demeanour. He had not been doing any betting at his usual haunt since the raid, but he was perched on his customary stool at the end of the counter, and it needed no second glance to show that he had been drinking heavily. Always one to carry his liquor well, the signs of excess were confined to the purple flush on his vast

countenance and the singular brightness of his eyes. His speech and gestures were under perfect control.

"Come on, Frank; I've some rare news for you," he shouted. At seven o'clock on the summer evening the bar was empty, and Mr. Tidmarsh had been in animated conversation with the barmaid —quite a new departure for him.

"We're William Tidmarsh, Esquire, now," said the lively young lady behind the counter with a wink at Bremner. "Nothing good enough but champagne, now that we've given up our naughty betting ways."

"Yes, my dear; and you can open another bottle of the 'boy' for William Tidmarsh, Esquire," said the bookmaker, fumbling for his pocket-book. "See here, Frank," he went on when the barmaid had gone to fetch the wine. "I'm in a fair way to find the chap that owns that pretty bauble."

He slipped on to his finger the crested signet ring which he had picked up in the office in Red Lion Court just after the assault on Mr. Beauchamp. To Bremner alone had he confided his discovery, under a solemn pledge of secrecy.

"You've heard something, my wife told me, and she thought it affected Miss Beauchamp," said Bremner anxiously.

"Affect her! yes, the lying little minx, to worm that out of me, what we tumbled to about the seizure of Roylance's colt, on pretence she was to see the baronite to-day and get his advice before telling me what she saw on the Downs! She well knew she wasn't going to see Sir Charles at all, because she's got another fellow in tow—him she's gone off with."

"Gone off with!" repeated Bremner feebly. "*What* on earth do you mean, Billy?"

"What I say," the bookmaker snapped. "I have it on reliable authority that the gal scooted last night with a feller, and that the bogus message from the hospital was all a put-up job between them. That's neither here nor there—the gal is nothing to me—but who do you think she scooted with?"

"Really, Bill, you must have got hold of the wrong end of the stick; but let's hear the name, anyway," said Bremner.

Tidmarsh waited till the barmaid had filled their glasses, imperiously waved her away, and sank his voice to a hoarse whisper, as he replied, "Your high-flown lodger, with her airs and graces in private life and a tipping office, has done a guy with the old man's partner, and who do you think *he* is? Why, the chap that killed poor Bess."

"But his *name*?" Bremner demanded incredulously, and with a touch of impatience. He had a sincere regard for his burly associate, but so he also had for the girl who had so generously paid out the man in possession in the hour of his need. He could only account for the bookmaker's strange excitement by the temporary lull in his avocation caused by the police proceedings.

"I shall know his name by Monday," said Tidmarsh, gulping down his champagne. "You know my informant—that smart young groom of Tannadyce's. He was in here this afternoon, and I screwed it out of him like a reg'lar Old Bailey lawyer. Tannadyce is sweet on the gal himself and has nosed it all out, but Skinner daren't tell me more till he's seen his master. By Monday they'll know where the pretty pair have flown to."

"And then?"

"Then Skinner'll tell me."

"And then, Tidmarsh, like a wise chap, you'll

lay an information and leave the law to take its course," urged Bremner, not in the least believing the charge against Nance, but hoping to steer his moody friend into wiser counsels.

But Tidmarsh would give no such pledge. Reaching over for the bottle, he refilled the glasses and smiled. "It's me that's running this show, Frank," he said. "Very likely the police will come in at the finish, but I'm going to pass the post in front of Croal. He was at your place to-day with Sir Charles, wasn't he?"

"I suppose it was the inspector; the missus told me Sir Charles called the other one Croal. What are we going to do about the Starlight job now, old man? I should lose my job at Nathan's if I was to warn Sir Charles, and there's no one else to —now that Miss Beauchamp has vanished from the scene."

"Let him slide," said the bookmaker decisively. "I ain't playing any gent's game. What do you want to warn him for? Croal's with him in this, and the 'tec has got to be kept out of the racket. If you tell anything to any one I'll never speak to you again. Besides, I've laid the colt freely at market odds, and it'll suit my book down to the ground for him to be a non-starter."

"Yes, I know; I stand to win a tenner on him from you myself," said Bremner with a rueful smile. "It's a new sensation to have to go and work against the horse that carries one's money."

But the clerk's private affairs had small interest then for Tidmarsh in the larger horizon opened up to him by the promised disclosure. He made no reply to Bremner's remark, but held up and contemplated the ring which he had slipped on to his finger.

"Hanged if I don't keep it there," he exclaimed,

caressing the golden circlet lovingly. "It shall be on my hand when I meet him—just as it was on *his* hand when he met poor Bessie in the gorse bushes. It's good at leaving marks behind, is this ring, and maybe it's got one more to leave before it retires from the business. Maybe——"

But he was not destined to conclude his speculative predictions about the ring, for the swing doors of the saloon bar were pushed open, admitting the wiry and, on this occasion, undisguised form of Mr. Croal. The inspector's keen glance settled on the bookmaker as the latter hastily thrust his hand into his pocket and withdrew it unadorned by the ring. But he had not been quick enough for that hawk-like gaze.

"Good evening, Mr. Tidmarsh," the inspector began affably as he advanced to the counter. "Been buying some new jewellery?"

"Not me," returned Billy in surly confusion. "Times are too hard for that—with the magistrates so down on one."

"Ah, well; it doesn't matter, though I'm a bit of a connoisseur in rings, especially signet rings," said Croal carelessly, and then added, turning to the lawyer's clerk: "May I ask if your name is Bremner? I've just been to Number 40, and Mrs. Bremner said I should find her husband here."

"Yes, that's me," was the reply. "I trust you have brought news of Miss Beauchamp?"

"Unfortunately not; but I have news of another kind," said the detective, with his eyes rather on Tidmarsh than on his questioner. "Old Mr. Beauchamp has recovered his senses at the hospital, and half an hour ago he furnished me with the name of his assailant."

At the inspector's startling announcement, Mr. Tidmarsh was hard put to it to stifle the exclamation

that rose to his lips, but he remembered just in time that to evince more than a general interest in the Beauchamps might put the detective on the scent of his own researches. He contrived to hold his tongue, but he utterly failed to keep his countenance.

The tell-tale spasm that rippled over that broad expanse in the effort at silence informed Croal on a point about which he had been not a little curious—how far Tidmarsh had got in the independent pursuit of the criminal, which he had threatened on the day of the inquest.

How the great stolid bookmaker had arrived at his conclusion, and how much or how little he knew, the inspector was unable to determine; but the upheaval on the mountainous face told him that Mr. Tidmarsh was growing "warm"—in fact, that he had succeeded in connecting the Beauchamps with the tragedy on the Downs.

It was galling to the professional investigator to note this progress on the part of an amateur, for he recollected that his own enlightenment on that portion of his case had sprung from the easy method of an anonymous letter. Moreover, the energy of the vindictive brother in acquiring information showed that his threat about the murderer was a very real one, and that he was a genuine competitor in the search.

Mr. Croal had come to Islington to inquire if the name given him by Mr. Beauchamp as that of his assailant was known to Bremner as that of an associate or friend of Nance, for the injured blind man had not been well enough to go into particulars. All that he had been capable of was to whisper the name of the person who had assaulted him. The inspector had already ascertained that the owner of *that* name had not been at his rooms for two days,

but in consideration of Tidmarsh's evident activity he decided not to put the question.

So when Bremner recovered from his surprise sufficiently to inquire who had been guilty of the outrage in the betting office he answered quite courteously that he was not at liberty to say.

"Then you haven't got him?" Mr. Tidmarsh deemed it in keeping with an interest in the subject of public importance to ask.

"It isn't my business to get him," replied the inspector. "Crime in Fleet Street, you know, is a matter for the City Police. I am only looking after him as a possible factor in Miss Beauchamp's disappearance to oblige a gentleman—Sir Charles Roylance, in fact, Mr. Bremner—who is an old friend of the family. I came up in the hope that the young lady might have returned and could give me some information."

This mendacious statement deceived neither of his hearers, but it served its purpose in allowing Mr. Croal to make a graceful exit, which he did, after taking a drink at Mr. Tidmarsh's expense.

When the swing doors had closed on him the bookmaker broke into a prolonged chuckle.

"Frank," he said, when his merriment had subsided, "that chap chaffed me on the day of the inquest when I told him I'd find Bessie's murderer first and make a gallows job of it. He said it was a race and he would win. But I'm well in the running. He may have got the *name*, but he hasn't got the *man*—or he'd have bragged of it. Come Monday and I shall know his chap and where he is as well."

## CHAPTER XXX

### DURANCE VILE

THAT first night of her incarceration at the Rook's Nest, Nance made no attempt to close her eyes in sleep. When she recovered from the effects of the anæsthetic which Ted the Pounder had used to quiet her in the brougham, she found herself alone in the back room to which she had been conveyed on arrival.

A night-light had been left burning by Mother Fury, presumably to show the hopelessness of escape; for by its feeble rays she quickly learned of the iron window-bars, and, finding the door, ascertained that it was locked on the outside. The fact that there was no bolt on the inside by which she could secure herself against intrusion was sufficient of itself to keep her awake and vigilant.

But above personal considerations, above the vague doubt as to what had befallen her and at whose hands, above her utter ignorance as to where she was, even above the dread of what fate might have in store for her, rose the wild tumult of despair that she would not now be able to warn Sir Charles Roylance about the intended distraint on Starlight the evening before the race.

Of course she attributed this latest outrage on her to Tannadyce, believing that in some way he had

guessed her ability to warn Sir Charles, and had taken this desperate step to frustrate her plans. But her surmise, though right as to the author of her captivity, miscalculated his reasons, for he had no knowledge of her bargain with Tidmarsh—a bargain which must now remain unfulfilled.

In a minor degree her enforced breach of faith with the bookmaker troubled her, for she guessed how she would be misjudged by him. She had obtained his secret, and had not given hers in return. But throughout the hours of the hot summer night the chief burden on her vexed soul was the money-lender's coming triumph in thwarting her lover on the eve of almost certain victory. If she had been aware that that was only an unforeseen hazard in Tannadyce's game—if she could have read the real workings of that sinister mind—she would have been oppressed by a greater terror.

From time to time there floated up to her through the echoing corridors of the old house the sound of distant laughter and ribald song, but to her great thankfulness no one came near the room. Then at last silence reigned, and, abandoning her vigil by the locked door, she went and sat by the open window till the first streak of dawn permitted of her extinguishing the light.

Gradually, through the bars of her prison, outside objects began to come into view—the branching foliage of the ancient trees, the flagstones of the courtyard, and the closed doors of the coal-shed and outhouses. One of the sheds, she noticed, was fastened with a heavy chain and padlock, and she tried to comfort herself that at least she had not been shut up down there.

Presently a patch of blue sky appeared over the tree-tops, and Nance knew that the sun must have risen. The increase of light brought the range of

doors round the yard into nearer relief, and as she leaned her fevered brow against the cool bars she was suddenly stricken with the idea that the padlocked door was shaken slightly.

She watched intently, and after a brief interval the door was certainly shaken again. This time the movement was obvious to her ears as well as to her eyes, for a faint scroop, as the door was gently pushed against the hasp of the padlock, was distinctly audible. After that the closed door that had been so mysteriously agitated had a fascination for her, and she riveted her gaze upon it on the chance of further developments, which did not arise. Thence onward the padlocked door remained as rigid as the rest.

An hour or more passed, and the girl's senses, all acutely straining for possible means of escape, were turned into a fresh direction—the *roof* of the coal-shed with the fastened door. The range of outhouses formed a "lean-to" against the high outer wall of the yard, and nearly at the top of the roof, close to where it formed an angle with the wall, a tile was slowly raised and as slowly allowed to drop into position again. Then another and another tile received the same treatment, till in the manipulation of the last one Nance caught a glimpse, for the fraction of a second only, of a human hand.

With the withdrawal of the hand the shed yielded no further sign of habitation, but that stealthy trial of the door and groping with the roof impressed Nance with the horror of her situation almost as much as her own experience had hitherto done. It was a weird and uncanny feeling that some one else besides herself was under lock and key within such narrow limits, and for one wretched moment she wondered if her enemies had spirited her into a private lunatic asylum.

But reflection told her that such things are not possible nowadays, with all the safeguards of doctors' and magistrates' certificates, and it was a relief to know that whatever place she was detained in, she had every legal right to escape from it if she could. As for that other in the coal-shed, it looked as if he or she were trying to put that right into practice.

So the hours passed till seven o'clock, when the song of thrushes and blackbirds in the tangled boughs was interrupted by the rattle of bolts below the window. Quickly stooping below the sill, Nance heard two persons step out of the back door into the yard.

"She's asleep, I reckon," came the sound of a man's voice, as though he were looking up at the window. Nance recognized it as that of the disguised rough who had got into the brougham with her the night before.

"No matter whether she is or not; she's safe enough," replied a woman in such melodious tones that Nance, emboldened by hearing the steps pass on, snatched a glance from the window, only to shrink back at once, appalled by a side-view of Mother Fury's awful face.

The destination of the pair was the coal-shed, and presently the jingle of the padlock chain tempted Nance to take a longer peep. The mulatto and her companion were evidently engrossed in the business of the moment, and, trusting to their preoccupation, she stood up and watched them, ready to draw back if necessary.

Mother Fury unlocked the door and said something which did not reach the window, as it was spoken into the black interior of the shed; but it had the effect of bringing to the door a little shrivelled creature whom Nance recognized with a thrill of

astonishment as Moses Cohen, the late "man in possession" at the Bremners'.

"There he is," said Mother Fury. "He don't look up to much, but he's got a tongue in his head, I suppose, so I thought we'd better keep him."

The ex-pugilist took a long look at the ragged old Jew, uttered a low whistle, and turned to the mulatto woman with an uneasy laugh.

"You've put your foot in it, old lady," he said. "This yere venerable party is the guv'nor's daddy, if I'm not mistook. Leastways he was pointed out to me as such a few years back, though he wore swell togs then. Say, Mister," added Ted the Pounder, turning again to the trembling old man, "me and this yere lady is drawing pay from Mr. Leopold Tannadyce. You're in the same swim along of him, ain't you?"

To the surprise of Nance, who expected that, as on a previous occasion, the name of his son would be hailed with a torrent of obloquy by the aged Hebrew, he looked up at his interrogator with something of furtive cunning in his expression, and replied—

"Same swim, of course, with my beautiful, clever son. He won't be pleased either when he hears that this Witch of Endor has shut me up a whole night in a coal-cellar."

"But why didn't you say you were one of us last night? All we could get out of you was that you wanted to sleep in the shed," said Mother Fury, crestfallen, yet suspicious.

"Because I am very old and feeble, and the strong man whom you set upon me was so rough that I was terrified. I thought that you must be the enemies, not the friends, of my son to treat me like that, forgetting that you could not know me. That was why I did not disclose myself," Moses Cohen replied.

The yellow hag shook her head, far from satisfied. "What did you come here for; and why did you go creeping about at the back instead of going to the front door?" she asked.

"I came to see that your employer's behests were properly carried out. It was not my intention that you should be aware of my presence," was the answer, given with a new-found firmness which puzzled Nance as much as the professed complicity of the old man with Tannadyce.

Mother Fury and the Pounder withdrew from the shed a little way and conferred together in whispers. The discussion lasted five minutes, at the end of which they returned to the shed door.

"Look here, old gentleman, if you're in Mr. Tannadyce's confidence you know as well as we do that it is too late for you to leave the Rook's Nest," Mother Fury said in a more conciliatory tone. "All communication with the outer world is cut off till the job is finished; but we don't want to put you to inconvenience, and we're sorry there was a mistake last night. We shall be pleased if you'll come into the house and live with the rest of us—so long as you observe the same regulations not to quit the grounds or go within sight of the road."

The old man laughed the shrill, elfin screech which Nance remembered so well in the Bremners' kitchen. "'Tisn't likely I should try to stop my pretty boy's plans, is it?" he wheezed. "But there mustn't be any more rough handling of me, mind, or Leo will want to know the reason why."

The curiously assorted trio passed into the house by the back door, leaving Nance in utter perplexity. That old Moses Cohen, who had professed such kindly and grateful regard for her, and had given her her first insight into Tannadyce's real character, should be found ranged in the camp of her enemies

was bewildering enough, but still more so was the misunderstanding which had evidently arisen as to his presence in the lonely house.

One point which was not lost upon her, and which more than all else seemed to spell danger, was the carelessness with which Mother Fury and her male accomplice had discussed matters within earshot of her open window. Was she of no account because she was never to be released alive ?

Was that the " job " that was to be " finished ? "

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE FIGHT IN THE PASSAGE

NANCE was still trying to solve that question an hour later, when the door of her room was unlocked and the hideous coloured woman whom she had seen in the yard entered, bearing a tray of breakfast things.

"Good morning, Miss; I hope you have slept comfortably," she said in the tuneful voice which somehow seemed to accentuate her repulsive appearance.

Her manner was as affable as that of a seaside landlady greeting the first lodger of the season, and its matter-of-fact tone seemed so incongruous to the girl who had been lured by a false message, drugged to silence and forcibly imprisoned, that her outburst of indignant inquiry and reproach was checked on her lips by sheer amazement.

"As you are so kind as to be interested in my comfort, perhaps you will be good enough to explain where I am and at whose instance I was inveigled here," said Nance drily.

But Mother Fury shook her head at the request. "My orders are very strict to give no information, Miss," she replied. "My duty begins and ends with making you as comfortable as possible while you

remain under my care, but I have permission to say that you won't be kept here for long."

Nance was on the point of declaiming against Tannadyce and divulging that she had overheard the conversation in the yard, but discretion prevailed. It also crossed her mind to admit acquaintance with old Moses Cohen and ask to be allowed to see him, but here again she decided on a policy of silence. Her captors were strong enough to detain her by force, even if she could induce the aged Jew to espouse her cause, and she recognized that she would stand a better chance of escape if she appeared to acquiesce in the futility of escaping.

"I suppose that you have considered the consequences of aiding and abetting this outrage, and that you know that you are rendering yourself liable to a long term of imprisonment?" she said boldly.

"Oh, the consequences have all been thought out and provided for by a wiser head than mine, and there won't be any so far as I am concerned," laughed the woman, giving her an evil glance. And having finished setting out the breakfast things, she came closer and said: "The consequences will all be on your side of the blanket, young lady, and you'd better keep a civil tongue in your head. Mayhap you'll want a good word from me when you get out of this."

"A good word from *you*!" echoed Nance scornfully.

"Aye," Mother Fury retorted, "even from me. There are other rooms in this old rat-warren besides this one. Mayhap you will be glad of some one to come forward and say which one you occupied, and that you were locked into it."

With which she went out abruptly, not forgetting to turn the key.

Her parting shot filled Nance with new apprehension. She had faced with contemptuous courage the horror of her situation so long as her liberty and perhaps her life seemed to be threatened, but the yellow hag's hint implied that a more insidious attack was contemplated on what she held dearer still. Why Tannadyce should have been at such pains to ruin her reputation she could not understand, but that was clearly indicated by the mulatto woman's suggestive words.

The yearning to break from the mysterious trammels that held her was increased fourfold by the interview with her female gaoler. Her lover with impetuous generosity had condoned her half-compulsory connection with a tipster's office, but could she expect his chivalry to bear the strain of the lies a man like Tannadyce could build upon her sudden disappearance?

What proof would she be able to allege that her sojourn in this sequestered house was otherwise than voluntary?

And who else besides the liveried roughs and the coloured woman were dwelling under the same roof —leaving Moses Cohen out of the question? That some one with whom it might be possible to link her name disreputably was on the premises the suggested threat of the mulatto left no doubt.

The question had hardly presented itself when it was indirectly answered by the smell of a strong cigar that was wafted through the iron bars from the yard below. Stealing to the window, Nance checked a startled cry and drew back, but not quick enough to avoid the bloodshot eyes of Lord Hooligan, who was gazing up with his coarse features creased in a malignant grin.

"Hullo, duckie! this is a pretty unsociable way of running an elopement," he called up to her. "If

it wasn't for those confounded bars I'd come the Romeo trick, but no matter. Old Mother Fury will give me the key presently, and then I'll come up for a chat."

A brutal laugh was followed by the sound of his retreating footsteps, but Nance cowered on the floor in a tumult of alarm, far from the window. She had half expected that Tannadyce himself might put in an appearance, but that this blatant ruffian, whom she suspected of deepest crime, should cross her path again, in a place where there was no Inspector Croal to scare him, filled her with despair.

To think that *his* was the blighting association from which she was to rely hereafter on the testimony of Mother Fury to save her reputation!

"Mother Fury," too! She shuddered as she repeated the gruesome nickname, so nerve-shaking in its appropriateness.

With a dull pain at her temples she rose and tried to calm herself in preparation for the unknown ordeal before her. Hooligan had threatened to procure the key of her room from the woman, and it did not seem to matter much whether the hag wished him to have it or not. The besotted peer was strong enough and brutal enough to take it by force, especially as he would presumably have the assistance of the two rogues who had come with the brougham. In terrified apprehension the girl's eyes never left the door.

But when at last it opened Mother Fury entered alone and proceeded to remove the remains of the scarcely touched breakfast. She preserved a taciturn and sullen demeanour now, and it seemed to Nance that while she busied herself about the room she was listening intently for distant sounds. None were audible on that occasion, but when, a few hours later, she reappeared with the midday meal the

listening attitude was again noticeable, and this time it was rewarded by a distant uproar, muffled curses, and shuffling feet far away downstairs in the front of the house.

The noise was followed by intense silence, at which Mother Fury breathed a chuckling sigh of relief, and departed, smiling grimly.

So the long day wore to evening, and Nance was no nearer solving the problem of escape than in the grey dawn when she had watched the liberation of Moses Cohen. Over and over again she had examined the door and the window, but the heavy oak panels of the one and the firm setting of the bars in the masonry of the other held out no hopes.

Mother Fury had brought her last meal of the day, and, simple flight being impossible, the captive was racking her brain for some ruse by which she could communicate with the outside world, when suddenly a stone came whizzing through the iron bars and fell with a thud on the bed. At first Nance thought that it must be one of Lord Hooligan's little pleasantries, but the next moment she pounced eagerly on the missile and detached from it a piece of paper in which it was wrapped.

Yes, there was writing on it. It was a message from outside.

"Much respected and beautiful benefactor (it began), I know not if you are aware of my presence in this abode of sin, but rest assured that in me you have a true friend who will render you assistance if opportunity occurs. I am not maltreated, because I am recognized as the father of my son; but I am not wholly trusted and am not permitted to leave.

"I only ascertained at noon to-day that you are held prisoner by these wretches. As my comparative freedom depends on their belief that I came to

the house as my son's emissary, and they conclude that I am in his confidence, I am obliged to pretend that I know his plans regarding you. I cannot, therefore, expose my real ignorance by questioning them, but must depend on any chance remarks that may drop to learn their designs. So far I have been able to gather nothing, except that there seem to be two parties who do not agree together. On one side are two rough fellows who have been prize-fighters, and on the other is a young man whom they call Hooly. It is difficult to say which side the woman takes, as she was out of the room serving up your dinner when the dispute occurred. Hooly wanted to follow her up to your room, but the other two restrained him by force.

"There seems to be plenty of food and drink in the house to last a long time, so no tradespeople ever come near, and none of the inmates ever go out. My heart bleeds for you, dear Miss, and if a feeble old man can do anything for you in this den of thieves it will be done, even at the risk of my life. It is possible that cunning may prevail against violence, though I fear much that the West Indian female is more than my match in both qualities. It is she who principally regards me with suspicion, but being forbidden by my son to communicate with him either by telegram or letter, she is unable to verify it.

"I overheard the two pugilists talking about a certain signal at which they were to leave the house, and I think they mentioned a rocket, though my deaf old ears may have prevented me from informing myself correctly.

"I will communicate again by same method if I find out anything more. In the meanwhile, if you are not aware of it, this house is near Mitcham, in Surrey. "Your decrepit friend,

"MOSES COHEN."

Beyond all the smattering of fact and surmise that formed the body of the scrawled note, the last five words caused Nance's eyes to glisten. It was something to have a friend, however "decrepit," in what the aged Jew rightly called "a den of thieves." And there was a ray of comfort, too, in some of the other items in the quaintly worded missive. It was good news that there was a split in the camp of her enemies, and that a signal had been arranged for quitting the place pointed, at any rate, to no prolonged duration of her agony of suspense.

Tired out with the sleepless vigil of the preceding night, and slightly reassured by Cohen's letter, Nance waited till the sun had set, and then flung herself, dressed as she was, on to the bed to try and snatch a few hours' oblivion. Almost immediately she sank into slumber, to dream peacefully of Starlight's raking stride flashing past the winning post five lengths ahead of all competitors. In her sleep she heard the cheer that greeted the popular victory.

Louder and louder in her ears buzzed the thunderous applause, till it woke her, and she started up trembling in every limb. For the noise that had inspired her vision was no dream at all, but a very real hubbub in the passage outside her door.

"Lemme go! Leave hold!" rose Lord Hooligan's angry snarl, thickened with rage and drink.

"Grab him a bit lower, Ted. Give him the double twist and shy him over your shoulder to me," roared another voice, which Nance recognized as that of the man who had driven the brougham.

"Can't do it, mate; he's got his fingers in my collar. Pass me on the stairs and take him behind," panted Ted the Pounder who was evidently bearing the brunt of the fray.

Her heart scarcely beating, Nance listened to the fury of the combatants. The stamping and sway-

ing, the oaths and turmoil continued, and, running like a refrain through all the fury of sound, the shrill treble of old Moses Cohen could be heard piping lamentations, and from somewhere in the background calling on the help of heaven.

Suddenly there went up a great shout from Brummagem Jem, "Here comes Mother Fury. Stick to him, Ted! Hullo, but you've fair copped it now!"

The last sentence tailed off into a wail of despair, as a resounding smack and the thud of a heavy fall reached Nance's straining ears. The next moment lurching footsteps approached her door, a key was inserted, and Hooligan burst into the room.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE TIGER LOOSED

"I SUPPOSE you know you're close shadowed, sir? Inspector Croal has been up and down nearly all day, and every time he passed along he spoke to one or two loafers that had the look of 'tecs."

The speaker was Skinner, who, top-booted and with his best livery on, stood before Tannadyce in his private room.

"I have derived much amusement, my dear Skinner, from the inspector's antics, and also from those of his merry men," replied the great money-lender lightly. "It was to defeat his simple-minded little game that I sent for you to step in before you drive me out to dinner. You have thoroughly mastered the information I want pumped into that amiable bookie?"

"Yes, sir; you taught me my lesson this morning."

"Well, I'm going to dine at Romano's. They'll follow me there to a certainty and hang about outside. When you set me down I shall order you to come back and fetch me in two hours, and you will drive slowly off as though returning to

the mews. If, as is probable, one of these fellows overhears me, he will think it a blind and that I am going to slip off long before the two hours are up. On the contrary, I shall enjoy an epicurean repast, while you, my Skinner, whip up as soon as you are out of the Strand and make all speed to your rendezvous with Mr. Tidmareh."

"I quite understand, sir."

"Then go and get on the cab; I will come out in a minute. By the way, have you made arrangements for firing that rocket whenever it may become necessary?"

"Yes, sir; I made friends with an old chap residing in a cottage at Beddington, and left it there ready. I shall fire it from his garden, and as it's on high ground, it will be visible at the Rook's Nest," Skinner replied, as coolly as if the firing of rockets was an every day item in his existence.

When the groom was gone Tannndyce leaned back in his chair and thoughtfully stroked his well-trimmed moustache.

"The event marches quickly, as they say in France," he muttered under his breath. "Here we are at Monday night and there is no sign that Mother Fury has failed to keep order in her rather mixed establishment. There can therefore have been no enlightenment of Croal from that end, and I will guarantee that he has got no clue to the Rook's Nest from this. And to-morrow night after the signal has been given, a visitor will put in an appearance there who will clear the air in that direction just about the time that Nathan's people are doing the trick at Epsom. Miss Nance Beauchamp ought to be thankful that some one will be willing to make an honest woman of her after the scandal of which she will have been the heroine."

Smiling at the prospect his forecast conjured up,

he threw a light overcoat over his evening dress and went down and got into the waiting cab. Shortly after they started Skinner opened the flap and informed his master that one of the loungers had called a cab off the rank and was following close behind.

"Just as I told you," Tannadyce called back. "By the way, don't forget to keep your eyes open on the way to Islington, on the chance of being followed. It's hardly likely Croal will think I've confided such a delicate mission to you, but it's best to be on the safe side."

Arrived at the Strand restaurant where we first made his acquaintance, the moneylender descended very leisurely from the cab on purpose to allow the "shadow" to come up. Thus when at length his smart patent leathers touched the pavement the detective was down already, pretending to pay his driver. Tannadyce was slightly disappointed. The man was a subordinate, quite unknown to him. He would have preferred bamboozling Mr. Croal in person.

Turning to Skinner, he carried out the programme sketched out in his office, and had the satisfaction of seeing his "treasure" faithfully obey the instructions, to which the shadow listened with obvious interest. As Tannadyce had foreseen, the plain-clothes officer watched him enter the gilded portals, and commenced to saunter about outside without paying any attention to the departing private cab.

In the meanwhile Skinner drove slowly away, and being an adept in street-craft was quickly assured that he was not being followed. He could not but admire his master's cunning in arranging for his interview with Tidmarsh in this way. If he had been sent straight up to Islington from the

office, one of the loungers would probably have been detached to investigate his errand. As it was, he had fulfilled a perfectly natural function in driving his master out to dinner, and he was now supposed to be engaged on an equally natural one in returning to the stables.

On leaving the Strand, Skinner drove slowly round Trafalgar Square, and on reaching St. Martin's Lane without any indications of pursuit, he shook his reins and went jingling northward at a good pace. Cautious as ever, he chose several detours through quiet thoroughfares, with the result that he pulled up outside the *Union Jack* in the absolute certainty that no other vehicle, be it cab or bicycle, had dogged his course.

He got down from his perch and glanced round for some one to look after his horse. The race for his patronage between two hangers-on of the street-corner type was won by a slipshod, unkempt wastrel who grabbed the reins with one filthy hand while touching a greasy bowler hat with the other.

"Oi'll moind the darlint same as if h' was me own," cried the successful loafer in a strong Hibernian accent.

After a critical scrutiny to see that he was sober, Skinner surrendered the cab to him and entered the saloon bar. The place was fairly full with customers, but contrary to his usual habit Mr. Tidmarsh was not installed on the end stool. Glass in hand he stood at the counter, and by the eagerness with which he came forward it was easy to see that he had been anxiously awaiting Skinner's arrival.

"Good lad, you ain't more'n five minutes late," he said. "Come along with me. I've fixed it up with Mr. Landlord to have the use of his parlour. 'Twouldn't do to talk private in this crowd."

He led the way through a door at the back of the saloon into a cosy room, decorated with sporting prints and stuffed fish in glass cases. It was a hot night, and the window had been left open at the bottom, but Skinner promptly shut it down. Tidmarsh, however, better posted in the geography of the house, explained that the window looked into a walled enclosure used for the storage of empty cases and bottles, and he compromised by drawing it down slightly at the top.

"No one ever goes there except the cellarman, but he's busy in the bar at this time of night," said the bookmaker. "Now, are you ready with that little bit of allright?"

"Yes," said Skinner, "I've got leave from my governor to speak, but there's a condition attached to it. You must promise faithfully not to give away the source of your information, no matter what happens."

"Yes, yes, I'll swear that," cried Billy with impatience. "The name, young feller?"

"It is Lord Hooligan," replied the groom, watching to see how the fateful announcement would be received. To his surprise, instead of the outburst of fury which he had expected, Tidmarsh preserved a quiet dignity far more effective.

"Oh, so poor Bess was a nobleman's fancy!" the bookmaker remarked quite gently. "I know Lord Hooligan by sight, and I've often thought, after watching his antics in the West End, that I'd have made a tidy sort of peer myself. Well, well! it'll make a stir. And where might the place be?"

Skinner was about to answer when Tidmarsh suddenly rose and threw up the lower half of the window, peering out into the blackness of the yard. It was past nine, and so dark that he could see

nothing, but before resuming his seat he shut the upper section of the window and drew the curtains.

"Thought I heard something, but I reckon it was nerves," he explained. "Better be on the safe side, though."

Skinner agreed, and proceeded to fulfil the most important part of his mission by accurately describing the position of the Rook's Nest, its approaches and various doors and windows. He added that his master had ascertained that Lord Hooligan was entertaining a couple of friends—ex-prize-fighters—who were, however, to leave on the following evening before nine o'clock.

"If you're going to put the police on to him it would be best to wait till after that lot have cleared, wouldn't it?" suggested Skinner in conclusion. "They might help him to get away."

Mr. Tidmarsh removed his cigar and blew a ring of smoke scornfully. "Police?" he repeated. "Ah, yes; of course. No, the police won't have a look in at the Rook's Nest till after nine to-morrow night, make your mind easy about that." And then, after a pause, he added: "They've got a *Ruff's Guide* in this pub, but it's odds against them having a *Peerage*."

He touched a hand-bell, and one of the barmaids put her head into the parlour. Yes, they had a *Peerage* about ten years old, if that was any use.

Mr. Tidmarsh nodded, and the fat red volume was placed before him. His huge fingers turned the leaves till he came to the name Hooligan among the barons, when a fierce but well-restrained joy rippled over his countenance. He pointed to the heraldic device of the family arms and crest and then solemnly extended his hand to Skinner.

"Shake, young feller," he said earnestly.

"There's no gammon about this yarn of yours. I've found that jumping cat at last."

And Skinner, gazing upon the rampant lion of the Hooligans, recognized that Billy had done a fair share of detective work on his own account before Tannadyce, for reasons of his own, had placed the final thread in his hands.

"The gal from the tipping-office is there along of him?" asked Billy, looking up from his scrutiny of the crest.

"Yes; you don't mean any harm by her, I hope?" said Skinner rather anxiously.

"God forbid! I don't make war on women, let alone one that was good to my pal Frankie Bremner," the bookmaker returned. "I saw her once or twice, and I shouldn't have set her down as one to consort with the likes of Hooligan."

Skinner remarked sagely that there was no accounting for the female taste, and added that having kept his promise it was time for him to be getting back to the West End. Tidmarsh assented, first, however, insisting that his informant should have a drink with him in the bar. While they were negotiating the refreshment Tidmarsh suddenly put his huge lips to the groom's ear and whispered—

"There's one beggar I should like to wring the life out of before I attend to the noble lord. S'pose you can't put me on to him as well—the chap that acted bogus registrar at Bessie's sham marriage?"

"No, I can't do that," snapped Skinner shortly, and without a break in his voice. But a close observer would have noticed that his hand shook as he abruptly set down his glass and with a curt good-night left the bar.

He found the cab all right, but to his surprise it was in charge of the second loafer—the one who had got beaten in the scramble for his patronage—

instead of the individual with the Irish accent to whom he had entrusted the equipage.

"Why, what's become of the man I left the cab with?" he asked, eyeing the man sharply.

"He was took bad, boss, and I agreed to finish the job," was the reply. "Him and me's pals, though business rivals, you see."

But shortly after the smart turn-out had gone jingling round the corner into Upper Street the Hibernian wastrel reappeared mysteriously outside the *Union Jack*. He seemed to spring from nowhere in particular, and his accent as he addressed his "business rival" no longer smacked of the Emerald Isle.

"All right, sir, I hope?" said the ragged-looking ruffian who had relieved him of the care of the cab.

"Might have been better," was the none too cheerful answer. "There was a nasty wall to climb, and a baffling window that was closed just at the crucial moment. But I learned enough, Smart, to be sure that we mustn't lose sight of Tidmarsh for a moment. He'll probably go up street to his home to-night, and you must stay and shadow the house. I will send another man along to help you directly I get to the Yard, and I shall turn up myself first thing in the morning to put the job through to a finish. In the meanwhile if he should make a move wire me at headquarters at once, but don't lose touch with him, Smart, my son, if ever you hope to be promoted sergeant."

With which Mr. Inspector Croal shambled off into Upper Street, with the gait of a born cab-tout, and hailed a hansom, the driver of which stared contemptuously at him till he produced his fare and whispered New Scotland Yard as his destination.

"Right you are, guv'nor," said the man. "You're faked up so natural that you must pardon me for shying at you. And you'll do me a favour if you'll kindly turn the seat-cushions."

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### FATE IN SUSPENSE

IN unlocking the door of Nance's prison-chamber after his overthrow of the pugilist, Lord Hooligan had made one little slip. In his drunken frenzy he had omitted to remove the key from the lock and bring it in with him, so that he could secure the door on the inside. The consequence was that just as he was advancing upon the trembling girl he found himself compelled to fall back and defend the door against the assault of the uninjured prize-fighter, assisted by the feeble efforts of Moses Cohen.

Nance watched the struggle with bated breath and soon saw that the great muscular shoulders of her persecutor were equal to the strain of keeping the door shut. But there was this ray of comfort in the situation. So long as those without tried, even ineffectually, to force an entrance, so long would Hooligan be prevented from molesting her.

In the brief breathing space thus gained she cast wildly about for means of self-protection—of escape, alas! there were none. If she had only possessed a weapon of some sort—a penknife even—she

would have plunged it, with a full sense of justification, into that broad brutal back. But she had nothing.

And then, suddenly, from the most unexpected quarter relief appeared. There was a faint sound at the open window, and by the thin gleam of the night-light Nance saw the head of a ladder reared above the sill. The next moment the hideous yellow face of Mother Fury showed between the iron bars, and the shining barrel of a revolver was thrust into the room.

With a thrill of what was not wholly horror, Nance perceived that the weapon was aimed full at Lord Hooligan, still struggling at the door. In his preoccupation he knew nothing of what was happening behind him.

But a second later he got his warning in the ringing crack of the pistol and the whistle of a bullet so close to his head that a chip of the splintered woodwork grazed his ear. He turned his head in speechless fury, evidently suspecting Nance, but he did not at once relax his resistance to those without.

Of the old bull-dog spirit of disregard for mere physical danger a grain was left in him still.

But it was not proof against the calm, melodious voice that drew his attention to the window where Mother Fury held the smoking barrel ready sighted for a second shot.

"Now you, Hooly, I've given you a sample of my shooting," she said. "Just you stand aside from that door, or I'll shoot you in earnest next time."

The frightful vision of the mulatto, combined with the evident intention in her quiet tones, worked its spell on the shattered nerves. Not quite without protest, however.

"But I thought we were all pals together, and you'll be hung if you shoot me, mother," he whimpered.

"Stand aside, I say—you that are here to escape hanging," came the quick retort.

Cowed and unstrung, Hooligan fell back from the door, and Brummagem Jem entered, panting with his efforts. The timid face of old Moses Cohen peered in after him. Nance would have given the world for six words with the aged Jew, but it was impossible without compromising him and probably getting him subjected to treatment as bad as her own.

"Come here and take my pistol, Jem," said the crone at the window. "That's right. Now keep him covered and march him down to the dining-room and stand him a drink till I can get round. Lock the door as you go out, and stick to that key yourself. Is Ted hurt much?"

"Comin' to, I think," the ex-bruiser replied. "'Twouldn't have happened like this if we could both have got at his lordship at once, but these dratted back stairs were too narrow. We had to take him one at a time, and he floored Ted atop of me."

"All right, we'll argue it below. Now, ta-ta, Hooly. You'd better skip while you've got a whole skin, and you must be uncommon thirsty."

"I am that," muttered Hooligan, and with a last vicious scowl at his rescued victim he beat an ignominious retreat, covered by Brummagem Jem's pistol.

Mother Fury remained at the window till the click of the lock had told her that the door was secured, and then, without a word to the captive, she descended the ladder, removed it, and was *heard* to enter the back door. After which Nance

Beauchamp, strong, country-bred girl as she was, fell for the first and last time in her life on the bed in a swoon which gradually gave place to a troubled sleep.

When she awoke it was broad daylight and the blackbirds and thrushes in the surrounding thickets of the tangled garden were chanting their morning hymn. At first the events of the past night seemed part of her recent dreams, but it was not long before realization broke in upon her. Strange to say, thankful though she was for the intervention of Mother Fury, this protection at the hands of those chiefly responsible for her detention seemed full of sinister menace.

For what fate was she so carefully guarded by people who, instinct told her, would commit any crime for gold?

The question received no hint of an answer when Mother Fury came in with her breakfast, for that evil woman was more than usually uncommunicative and made no reference to the tumult of the preceding night. To Nance's pathetic appeal for an assurance that the scene would not be repeated she turned a deaf ear and went out, smiling darkly.

All that day and the next, which was Tuesday, the same doubt and uncertainty prevailed, and to Nance's vague fears on her own behalf was added the distracting knowledge that that very night the base device for robbing her lover of the chance of retrieving his fortunes would be put into practice. Some time before midnight, at Nathans' bidding, Frank Bremner would perform the thankless task of removing Starlight from the training stables, armed with all the authority of the law.

When Mr. Tidmarsh, on the eventful evening of her ensnarement, had divulged Tannadyce's

intentions, as picked up by him at Nathans' and pieced together by Bremner, it had been in her mind to warn Sir Charles Roylance at the meeting which she expected to have with him on the following day. Forearmed with a knowledge of the mean project, that astute trainer, Tom Barron, might have devised an expedient for defeating it.

That would now be impossible. In a few hours the sheriff's officer, personally conducted by the lawyers' clerk, would swoop down unexpectedly on the training stables, and Barron would have to comply with the legal demands. A thousandfold she regretted that she had not written full particulars to Sir Charles the moment they were told to her.

The slow day dragged wearily to evening and Nance went and sat at her barred window, with its limited horizon of sheds and spreading foliage. She was looking forward to the night with renewed apprehension, for distant sounds of riotous uproar, snatches of vulgar songs and ribald laughter, which had begun early in the afternoon, were rising in increasing volume from the front of the house. The inauguration of such an orgy seemed to point to the healing of the breach between the two factions of her tormentors.

It was true the same thing had happened on the previous evening in a minor degree and nothing had come of it, but it had been nothing like the boisterous saturnalia now raging below.

Suddenly, through the back door, Moses Cohen shuffled out into the yard, and looking up at the window placed a shrivelled finger to his lips. Having thus enjoined the need for secrecy, he ran like an elderly monkey to the coal shed and returned with a lump of coal, round which he wrapped a

piece of paper, and stood, a ludicrous figure, in the attitude of one about to throw. Nance nodded, caught the missile, and smiled gratefully down at her faithful correspondent, who with further signs for silence glided back into the house.

Moses Cohen's latest production ran as follows—

"RESPECTED AND BEAUTIFUL MISS,—At great hazards I write this to advise you that in my opinion there is mischief brewing for to-night. What shape it will take I cannot say, for it is impossible to fathom the real relations existing between the parties. I give you the facts, so that you may perchance see them clearer than I can. Since the fight the night before last they have all appeared to make friends, but towards the close of each day the others have striven to make Mr. Hooly drunk. They have not found it a hard job to make him drink, but it takes a deal to incapacitate him, which for some reason seems to be their object.

"Somewhat curiously, owing to my proffering my feeble help when Hooly made his dastardly attempt on your room, having found another key which fitted your door, the others treat me with increased respect and confidence. That hateful woman said to me to-day, as if she expected me to understand: "The rocket is sure to be fired to-night; we must be ready to flit." I nodded as though fully comprehending, though it was as Greek to me. Her words, however, seem to indicate an impending climax, and you would do well, dear miss, to be prepared, though God knows how or what for. It is just possible that some circumstances may arise of which you may be able to take an advantage. Would that a braver heart, a shrewder head, and a stouter arm than mine were

at your service, for I fear that I cannot comfort you with the assurance that Mother Fury and the pugilists mean anything but harm to you in spite of their conduct the other night. Their conversation, when Hooly is not present, implies some deep-laid wickedness, the discussion of which entails the frequent mention of your name. Indeed, the woman strikes one as a malignant fiend in female shape who loves evil-doing for its own sake.

"My faith, my child, is not your faith, but I commend you to the Great Creator who watches over all.

"M. C."

Nance was touched with the old man's solicitude, but more than ever alarmed by his news. The master mind who had planned her capture and was pulling all these puppets must have some deeper scheme than preventing her interference in the Starlight matter—some scheme which, her instinct told her, affected her honour as a woman.

Not much time was allowed her for consideration of the old Israelite's letter. She was perusing it for the second time, trying to read "between the lines," when the well-known footstep of Mother Fury outside caused her hastily to conceal it. The mulatto unlocked the door and entered.

"Come with me," was her curt order, accompanied by a keen glance round the little room.

Nance could hardly believe her ears, her heart beating wildly in the hope that her release was at hand. All willingly she obeyed, and followed her hideous conductress from the scene of those miserable three days along several uncarpeted passages till they came to a spacious landing at the head of the main staircase. But here her sanguine

expectations were cruelly brought to an end. Instead of descending the stairs the woman stopped short at the door of one of the principal rooms and beckoned her into it.

"A change of quarters will do you good," she sneered, and, going out, promptly locked the door.

Gulping down her tears of disappointment, Nance proceeded to look around her new prison, and she at once saw that for comfort it was far superior to the cramped back room in which she had hitherto been confined. It was a fairly large apartment, with pretentions to a better style of furnishing, though, like everything in the house, each article was moth-eaten and mouldy.

But her troubled gaze, ranging round the unfamiliar surroundings, lighted on a discovery which drew from her a little cry of satisfaction. There were heavy bolts, top and bottom, on the inside of the door, so that it was in her power to barricade herself against intruders.

Little thinking that the room had been selected for its purpose because those very bolts would lend colour to the story of her enemies, she hastened to shoot them home, and felt safer than since her capture.

Again, at the window, what at first sight seemed a pleasant surprise was in store for her. Here there were no bars, and clustering thickly round was a wealth of gnarled ivy, which would be as good as a ladder to one who had climbed every apple tree in the old orchard at Beauchamp Grange.

Cautiously opening the casement, she peered out in the fast-failing twilight, only to draw back instantly with a short catch of her breath.

Immediately below her window, standing on the broad moss-grown path that encircled the house

were Ted the Pounder and Brummagem Jim, not looking up at her, but conversing in low tones with some one at the open French window of the room below.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE FIRING OF THE ROCKET

NANCE quietly drew the casement inwards again, without quite closing it. She hoped to hear the conversation that was going on below, but the tones of the speakers were too warily subdued to reach her.

Could she have looked through the floor, or have obtained a bird's-eye view from some tree outside, her gaze would have fallen on a strange sight. It was Mother Fury who was talking to the pugilists, and she was dressed for out-of-doors. A rather guady bonnet covered her ebon locks, a black lace mantilla enveloped her ample person, and in her hand she carried a string bag of the sort used in shopping.

In the same chair, close to the dining-room window, in which three nights before he had waited the coming of his "dear old pals" and of Nance herself, sat Lord Hooligan, very drunk, and for all practical purposes quite incapable—though, as he could still fix a glazing eye on the decanter at his elbow and occasionally clutch it in a shaking hand to replenish his glass, he would probably have been insulted by the description.

As a factor in the situation his lordship had ceased

to count, and the others had ceased to heed him as a listener, merely humouring him as they might a silly child.

In the background, up and down the dining-room floor, Moses Cohen was trotting like a restless old panther, his dirty grey beard waving in the night breeze that blew through the open French window, causing also the lamp on Hooligan's spirit table to flicker and cast strange shadows.

"So you've shifted 'er Ry'le 'Ighness into the State Apartments?" Ted the Pounder was saying. "She ain't tried to get out down the ivy yet."

"Your ugly face'll stop her from that game. I'd lay a dollar she's had a squint at it already, and also shot the bolts to keep that bold bad nobleman out. Ha! ha!" laughed Mother Fury softly.

All their talk was conducted softly, and not without furtive glances at the thick shrubbery that grew to within a few yards of the windows. But Brummagem Jem, who appeared to have been told off for the duty, chiefly kept his gaze fixed on an alley in the hazel coppice, through which alone could a view of the sky to the southward be obtained.

Whatever it was he was watching for, he and his companion served the double purpose of guarding Nance. So long as the two pugilists stood under her window she would not be able to essay the descent of the creepers.

"Wake up, Hooly, and tip us a song," said Mother Fury presently, surveying the helpless sot in the chair with a critical eye. "It's my belief you're shamming drunk."

Hooligan's head had fallen forward on his chest, but at the invitation he raised it and began to gurgle out a droning chant that was almost inaudible beyond the confines of the room—

I've wannered 'bout a bit in my time,
Of troublesh I've sheen a goo' few;
But I foun' it besht in every crime
To paddle my own canoe.

"*Clime*, not *crime*, you silly," grinned the Pounder from the path outside.

"Tell you isth crime. Always paddle my own crimes," querulously insisted the noble peer; and his head fell forward again before his nerveless grasp had been able to close on the brandy.

"No mistake about it, Mother, he's copped it fair this time," said Brummagem Jem, who had turned from his vigil to watch the piteous effort of the hereditary legislator.

"What's the time, Mother?" asked the other pugilist after a pause, and there was a touch of impatience in his voice.

"A quarter to nine; if that thing doesn't show up soon I shall go and put her ladyship back in her own little cell," was the reply.

"Which 'll mean we'll all have to stay another night in this old barrack," the Birmingham prize-fighter grumbled.

"Of course, if there's no signal it will mean that nothing will happen to-night. We mustn't quit till we get the office, if we're to finger the pieces that's promised us," was the mulatto's reply.

The group at the window started as a high-pitched quavering voice from the interior of the room drew their attention to Moses Cohen, who had paused in his singular trot to and fro and was shaking a warning finger at them.

"I shouldn't advise any of you to quit till you have earned your pay," he said.

The two ruffians on the path exchanged glances with Mother Fury. It was the first time the old man had shown any signs of exercising the authority

with which he had professed to be armed, except when he had joined his puny efforts with those of the pugilists to keep Hooligan out of Nance's room. His interference at this stage removed the last vestige of doubt from Mother Fury's mind. She accepted him as Tannadyce's representative, on a point that had vexed her.

"All right, Mr. Cohen," she laughed. "No fear but what we'll see it through. I've left the key in her door on the outside, after locking it. Is that right, do you think—if we have to quit."

Moses Cohen pondered the question with an air of deep wisdom before delivering himself of the following oracular reply—

"If it is left in the lock it may be held hereafter that the lady was detained under compulsion; if it is removed there will always remain the doubt whether the door was not locked on the inside."

"Right you are; it's the doubt we want," said Mother Fury decidedly. "I'll run up and fetch the key before—— Ah, there it goes!"

The interruption was caused by the majestic rising of a rocket into the southern sky, plainly visible down the alley in the hazel coppice.

The great streak of fire soared slowly into the air and then burst in a cluster of red and blue stars that sank amid a shower of golden rain and was lost to sight behind the tree-tops.

"Gives one the creeps—now it's come. Seems almost as if there was eyes staring at us and waiting out in yonder bushes," said Ted the Pounder, rather white.

But Mother Fury was all for action. The sudden emergency had driven the key of Nance's room out of her mind. "Don't stand gibbering there, you idiot! I've no patience with such nonsense," she hissed. "No noise now. Give me a hand, both of

you, to shift this chair closer to the window. Quietly does it."

The two men obeyed, and together lifted Hooligan bodily in his chair and placed it so that his legs protruded on to the path. Mother Fury moved forward the table with the lamp and the spirit decanters, arranging it so that the drunken peer formed the centre of a shaft of light which shot past and round him on to the garden path till it was finally checked by the dense foliage of the shrubbery.

"That'll do," the mulatto hoarsely whispered. "She won't try climbing down out of window while his feet show there and his shadow falls athwart the path. Now it's time for us to git."

Two minutes later Mother Fury and Moses Cohen, with the liveried pugilists on the box, were rumbling down the drive in the brougham which had brought Nance, and which had stood ready harnessed in the stable-yard for the last hour.

At the bend in the drive the coloured hag put her head out of the carriage and looked back. Lord Hooligan's reclining figure showed up plainly in the band of yellow light diffused from the lamp behind him.

"There's an end of *him*," she exclaimed as she resumed her seat with an uncanny laugh that made Moses Cohen shudder in every joint of his emaciated frame.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### A SOFT-ROED BLOATER

"ANY nice dried fish this morning, mem? 'Addicks, kippers, bloaters, all fresh."

The tempter deposited his basket on the doorstep of 17, Beaker Street, and surveyed Mrs. William Tidmarsh with the insinuating smile of the itinerant hawker.

The lady was large and well-favoured, albeit for the moment not in the best of tempers after being brought by a resounding peal of the bell to answer the door while her hair was yet in curl-papers. They were not early risers at No. 17, and it was scarcely nine o'clock.

"No, thank you; I deal at the fishmonger's," snapped Mrs. Tidmarsh, and would have shut the door in the hawker's face if he had not adroitly given his basket a twist so that the handle prevented the manœuvre.

"Just a relish for your good gentleman's breakfast, mem. Come, I'll put you in two of these 'ere bloaters, warranted soft-roed, for three-ha'pence. You'll never regret it." And with the patient persistence of his class the vendor selected a couple of fish and held them alluringly close to the lady's nose.

"I tell you," she was beginning, when from the inner regions there rang out the male command—

"I could do with a soft-roed 'un for breakfast, my dear. I'm partial to 'em that way."

That settled the matter, and, grumbling to herself, Mrs. Tidmarsh took out her purse and, finding nothing smaller, tendered a florin in payment. The hawker gave her a shilling and some coppers in change, and, shouldering his basket, proceeded down the street, crying his wares.

By the time Mr. Tidmarsh descended from the bedroom the succulent "soft-roed 'un" was ready for him, done to a turn, but his wife noticed that he was strangely preoccupied and paid more attention to the vendor of the fish than to the dainty itself. The man was still in the street, coming back on the opposite side, and every now and then the bookmaker would rise from his seat to peer at him from behind the window curtains.

"That chap won't eat you, Bill; why don't you get on with your victuals?" said Mrs. Tidmarsh severely.

Mr. Tidmarsh, who had kept the secret of his intended revenge locked in his own huge bosom, shot a cunning glance at his wife. He dared not tell her of the work he hoped to accomplish that day, yet he wanted her assistance in a little project that had been germinating in his brain during the last five minutes.

For he thought, without being positively sure, that the voice of the fish-hawker was the voice of Inspector Croal—the very last person with whom he wished to be troubled during the next twenty-four hours. His project was aimed at bringing the detective to confusion, so that he might pursue his blood feud in peace.

"Sue," he said solemnly, "it's my belief that that hawker's a 'tec."

The modicum of truth doled out to her was more

than sufficient to command Mrs. Tidmarsh's interest and co-operation. Since the raid by the local police had caused her husband to abandon his calling for a while money had been "tight," and she had had to abandon those Sunday excursions in a hired trap, which, as opportunities for the display of gorgeous raiment, were the chief delight of her existence. Consequently she was consumed with a pious hatred of all detectives.

"You don't mean it!" she gasped.

"Hang me if I don't," responded her husband. "Now, see here, Sue; I've got to best that cove. You paid him in silver; I heard from the top of the stairs. What change did he give you? A bob and some coppers, eh? Well, go up to the bedroom and fetch that bad shilling I took a while back. You'll find it on the mantelpiece."

Mrs. Tidmarsh not unnaturally jumped to the conclusion that her husband was still under surveillance for betting, and obeyed with alacrity. While she was gone Mr. Tidmarsh took another peep from the window and saw that the hawker was sitting on the kerb a little higher up. Just as Mrs. Tidmarsh returned and handed her husband an unmistakable "duffer" the man rose and got on the move again in a direction which would bring him past the house once more. Tidmarsh strode to the front door and flung it open, holding the base coin in the palm of his hand.

"You thieving rogue!" he thundered as the hawker came up. "You're a pretty feller to be passing bad money on the missus, and I'm going to lock you up. Here, you nipper (to a gaping shopboy), run round into Upper Street and send along the first p'liceman you meet."

Mr. Croal, for the hawker was indeed Mr. Croal, by being surprised into his natural facial expression

for the fraction of a second, gave away the first trick in the game he was destined to play that day. Mr. Tidmarsh was sure of his man now and realized that he must win a duel of wits with a keen antagonist before he could, unwatched, reach the lonely house at Mitcham where his prey awaited him.

Mr. Croal was in the painful predicament of not knowing whether he had inadvertently passed a bad shilling or not. It was quite probable that he had done so; on the other hand he did not overlook the chance that Tidmarsh had recognized him and was taking this course in order to get rid of him. For the moment he was nonplussed, but he thought it advisable to sustain his assumed character.

"I ain't passed no bad money—knowingly at least," he replied, feigning the requisite whine.

"You can tell that to the magistrate," stormed the bookmaker. "Here, constable," as the officer arrived, "I give this man in charge for passing bad money—a reg'lar old hand, I expect."

The policeman examined the pewter shilling which had been reposing on the bedroom mantelpiece for six months, and shook his head wisely as he pulled out his notebook to take the prosecutor's name and address. But Mr. Tidmarsh waved it aside.

"Never mind that," he said; "I'll come along to the station with you and charge him myself."

For he knew that the moment Croal was alone with the constable he would make matters right for himself by producing his official card, whereas so long as he desired to preserve his incognito he would not divulge his identity in Mr. Tidmarsh's presence. The latter meant, if he could, to get his shadow badly "left" in the attempt to follow him.

So Mr. Croal was duly taken into custody and

Mr. Tidmarsh marched close at his heels so that he could have no opportunity of whispering to the constable. It was not till he was half-way to the station that the bookmaker remembered that this early commencement of hide-and-seek with the inspector had relieved him of one unpleasantness. He had been sorely dreading saying good-bye to his wife that day, all ignorant as she was of his homicidal intentions. Now that awkward farewell would not be necessary. He would not go home again till after he had "wiped out Hooligan."

Croal accepted the position with resignation, confident in his ability not to lose sight of his man. His investigations during the last day or two, especially Skinner's meeting with Tidmarsh at the *Union Jack* on the previous evening, had convinced him that Tannadyce was playing a deep game and using the bookmaker to pull the chestnuts out of the fire. In fact he had gained a shrewd inkling of the truth—that Tidmarsh's private vendetta against the slayer of his sister had been seized on by the moneylender to terminate an association that would be inconvenient in the event of Hooligan being brought to trial.

The inspector had ascertained that the dissolute peer had completedly vanished from his usual haunts, and all his efforts to connect Tannadyce with the fugitive had failed till he hit on the idea of watching Tidmarsh as well as Tannadyce. Though he had been unable to overhear much of the interview with Skinner, he had learned enough to guess that the bookmaker would lead him straight to his quarry and enable him not only to prevent the law being taken into private hands but to execute a certain document in his possession.

The document was a warrant for "wilful murder" against Henry Augustus Vansittart Blundell,

Baron Hooligan, of Hooligan, in the County of Waterford.

Arrived at the police-station, the constable quickly put his prisoner and the prosecutor through the usual formalities before the inspector on duty. Croal refused to give any name or address, and having been measured and charged was hustled off to a cell, from which, after a hurried explanation and exhibition of his card, he emerged exactly forty seconds later—in time to catch sight of Mr. Tidmarsh's broad back descending the station steps.

Mr. Croal had won the second trick and started in pursuit. He would have been glad of five minutes to do a "quick change" into a fresh disguise, but all he could do was to leave his basket of "soft-roed 'uns" with the respectful and sympathetic, but highly amused, local police.

Then began a chase which was diversified by varying fortunes. Tidmarsh's object was to kill time, for he did not want to go down to Mitcham till the evening, when the pugilists mentioned by Skinner would have left him a clear field. He wandered down to the Strand, stared at the shops, lunched at Gatti's, and, finally, about four o'clock when leaving the *Grand Hotel* buffet, after a drink with a chance-met sporting acquaintance, became aware that Croal was not shaken off after all.

He smiled grimly to himself as he noticed the absence of the fish-basket and the ragged garments of the "hawker." Somehow, a basket, or a handful of bootlaces, or a bunch of grounsel seemed necessary to the inspector's make-up, and Mr. Tidmarsh rejoiced at the incompleteness. He must have put his shadow to considerable inconvenience to hustle him into such a lack of consistency in his disguise.

Well, the game would have to begin all over

again—that was all. The bookmaker said good-bye to his friend, hailed a hansom, and gave the word in a loud voice for 17, Beaker Street. But Croal was not deceived by the ruse. Jumping into another cab, he soon perceived that the bookmaker was instructing the driver through the flap, with the result that the cab turned up the Haymarket, crossed Regent Street, and finally pulled up at the northern entrance of the Burlington Arcade.

Mr. Tidmarsh was down and into the Arcade before Croal's cab stopped, and then the inspector realized that he had been "done on the post" again. Just as Tidmarsh had artfully calculated, Croal's disreputable appearance did not find favour with the beadle on duty at the gate, and it was not till after a lengthy explanation that the detective was permitted to pass in. By that time the man he was pursuing was ensconced in a tabocconist's shop half-way down the Arcade, bending over the counter and pretending to make an elaborate choice of a cigar.

His idea was that Croal, on being allowed to enter, would dash straight through and out at the other end, in the supposition that he himself would have done the same. But in this respect his cunning had overreached itself. Croal certainly made all speed to the southern exit, but there he introduced himself to the second beadle, and quickly ascertained that no one answering to Tidmarsh's description had gone out that way—no difficult matter, owing to the showy suit worn by the bookmaker.

So presently Mr. Tidmarsh, who had lighted his cigar and seated himself in the shop to await developments, had the chagrin of seeing his antagonist slowly repass, and he was not at all sure that the inspector's sharp eyes had not caught sight of him in the dark interior. After that it became a battle

of patience, Croal patrolling the Arcade and Tidmarsh smoking cigar after cigar while maturing a fresh plan.

He hit on one at last, and none too soon, if he was to catch the train to Mitcham he had decided on—the 6.45 from Victoria. The afternoon had slipped away apace in all these dodgings to and fro, and it was already past six. His move was also expedited by the fact that the tobacconist had begun to eye him askance, despite his profuse purchases.

He rose and walked from the shop, and knew long before he was out of the Arcade that Croal was close on his tracks. Disregarding him entirely, he hailed a cab in Piccadilly, and bade the man take him to Victoria Station. There he swaggered into the first-class booking-office and asked for a Pullman-car return for Brighton. The express was drawn up at the main-line departure platform, and Mr. Tidmarsh ostentatiously seated himself in the drawing-room car.

The third-class carriages were in the front of the train, and a minute later he saw Croal go by the car towards them. Once again he was trading on the unfortunate detective's make-up, for he told himself with much satisfaction that his pursuer's present style was hardly "classy" enough for the Pullman. And this time his simple-hearted cunning was crowned with success.

The whistle sounded, the train began to move, but not till it was well in motion did he step from the platform of the car on to the platform of the terminus and wave a parting hand to the fast receding face of Mr. Croal, who was leaning out of one of the third-class carriages, peering back.

"'Yah! What price soft-roed 'uns?" resounded the bookmaker's jubilant shout.

Croal tore frantically at the door-handle of his compartment, but the train had gathered too much way for a safe descent, and those within restrained him from making the attempt. With a sigh of relief Tidmarsh ran round and jumped into the suburban train, which started almost as he sank into his seat.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### "VENGEANCE IS MINE"

THAT night, as the lengthening shadows grew to dusk, Mr. Tidmarsh found himself in a maze of country lanes in the neighbourhood of Beddington and Carshalton. He had not lost himself by any means. Skinner's directions had been far too explicit for that. But he was eking out the remaining daylight by prowling in ever narrowing circles towards his prey.

Suddenly, as he was traversing a cross-road that ran over a low hill, he came upon a labourer's cottage nestling just under the brow. Adjoining the cottage was a strip of garden-ground separated from the road by a thick hedge and running some fifty yards down the hill. Walking on the soft turf at the roadside his footsteps made no noise, and he was passing the garden when he heard voices on the other side of the hedge. One of them seemed strangely familiar.

"Don't ask questions, old man, and you won't be told any lies. You've got a quid for allowing me to use your garden. What more do you want?"

Yes, there could be no doubt about it, Mr. Tidmarsh told himself. The speaker was Mr. Tannadyce's groom-coachman—his informant of the

previous night. There was no mistaking Skinner's level tones, and he crept closer to the hedge to listen.

"Dunno as iver I've seen vireworks since forty year ago at the Christian Pallidge, when I were a boy," after a pause came the tones of an unmistakable rustic.

"Well, you'll see one in a few minutes," returned Skinner shortly.

"The stick won't drop in the thatch of my cot, will 'e?" the anxious proprietor inquired next.

"Hanged if they ain't firing a rocket," muttered Tidmarsh, and suspicious of everything that might affect his purpose, he found a thin spot in the hedge and peered through. His surmise proved correct. It was nearly dark, but he could just discern Skinner engaged in adjusting a big conical rocket on a hurdle, while the old man in a smock frock hovered around.

"It's time now, I think; give us the matches, gaffer," Skinner was heard to say.

A moment after the match flared up, and the bookmaker saw, too late to stop him, that the groom's inexperience in pyrotechny had led him to the brink of disaster. Instead of applying a light to the rocket from a distance by means of a long stick, as a piece of such size demanded, he held the match directly to it. The tremendous rush of fire from the tube as it shot upwards struck him full in the wrist, so that the roar of the ascending rocket was mingled with his scream of agony as he fell writhing to the ground.

"My God!" he cried, wild with pain. "My God! But this is retribution. Bessie Beckford's murderer is to die to-night, and I, who aided him in the mock marriage, have to suffer torments."

Mr. Tidmarsh, whose humanity had prompted him to run through the garden gate to proffer

assistance, paused, thunder-struck, as he stooped over the injured man.

"What do you mean by that?" he said.

But Skinner, in his anguish, could only groan and mumble inarticulately, "I was the registrar—the sham registrar—master's orders."

"You don't take back what you said last night? Lord Hooligan was the man?" asked Tidmarsh, bending low.

"That is true enough, but best leave him alone, Mr. Tidmarsh, and inform Croal. I will atone all in my power. This is a plot of Tannadyce to keep himself clear of the business," the scorched wretch murmured, and put an end to further questions by quietly fainting.

Some relatives, male and female, of the old rustic had come into the garden, so Mr. Tidmarsh did not feel called upon to remain.

"Best send for a doctor," he told them, and went out into the lane, puzzled but in no way turned from his purpose. If he could get his hand on Hooligan's throat it was no matter to him whether he was playing Tannadyce's game or not. Whatever the moneylender's guilt might be, he had not actually murdered his sister, and he could get square on him after he had settled with the prime culprit.

He was anxious now to reach the Rook's Nest with the least possible delay, for he could not fathom the deep waters in which he was plunged. The rocket might be a warning for all he knew. He suspected everything and believed nothing—after Skinner's confession.

"That cursed Jew, Tannadyce, goes and puts up the job and then betrays his pal. Hanged if I can make head or tail of it—except that I've got to even the book with his lordship to-night," he growled, as he passed through the Rook's Nest gates.

A moment later he stepped from the drive into the bushes, as a brougham, rapidly driven, swung by and out into the road.

"Them's the bruisers," he reflected as he resumed his course.

At the bend in the drive he got his first view of the house, of which, in the gloaming, only the skeleton outline and the lighted dining-room windows were visible. He could see a man sitting at one of the windows, and he clenched his teeth as he told himself that it must be his enemy. The distance was too great for recognition.

Mr. Tidmarsh had brought no weapon with him. He had thoughts of arming himself, but on reflection had decided that that sort of thing was "un-English." Above all, the burly bookmaker prided himself on being a Briton. No; he had learned to rely on his fists as a lad, and his fists should do the business. If Hooligan could meet him at the game he would go under with the best grace he could, but he trusted in a clean cause to give him the victory, and then, God help his adversary. It would be a fight to a finish, but not under Queensberry rules. So sure as he got in a knock-out, so sure would his fingers complete the job—by squeezing my lord's life out.

His heart beating with fierce joy, he stole towards the house, keeping in the shelter of the shrubbery. As he neared his goal the objects in the dining-room grew clearer. He noted the legs of the solitary occupant protruding from the French window; he made out the table with the lamp and the decanter; he could almost recognize the flushed face of the notorious peer.

He saw his intended victim suddenly rouse, and half turn to the table and then he saw no more. For with the rapidity of a transformation scene

the whole vision was blotted out; the window and the room behind it were plunged in darkness black as the pit.

The black gloom that had so unaccountably enveloped the dining-room where Lord Hooligan was seated was not of more than two seconds' duration. It was succeeded by a flash of dazzling light as startling by its suddenness as had been the swift swoop of darkness.

Mr. Tidmarsh, who had halted in amazement, began to move forward again, but he had not taken many steps when he perceived that a great change had taken place in the scene at the window. The man in the chair was no longer visible, nor, indeed, were any of the objects previously observed. The first clear flash had given place to a vibrating dancing mass of blurred light that obscured rather than illuminated.

And then a scream as of a lost soul pierced the stillness of the summer night, and volumes of smoke rolling from the window proclaimed the horrid truth. The room was on fire, and its occupant was overcome by the flames.

For one brief moment the bookmaker stopped again—from sheer fright of the supernatural. It was as though for the second time that night an unseen hand had intervened to wreak the vengeance he sought, and again by the dread agency of fire. But, mastering the feeling, he ran on, remembering that if Skinner's tale were true Nance Beauchamp also must be in the burning house.

The bookmaker's vast bulk was not conducive to fleetness, and long before he neared the now blazing window he saw that the fire had got a firm hold on the room. At the same time he became conscious of running footsteps behind him—footsteps far speedier than his own. A phantom form

rushed past without a word and was already busy at the window when at last he panted up to the house.

Gruesomely busy was that stranger who had passed him in the drive. He had just seized a pair of boots that stuck out of the window, and by them had pulled from the raging furnace within the charred and smouldering body of a man. The blistering features of the corpse were only recognizable by the savage scowl as those of Lord Hooligan.

Then the stranger looked up at Tidmarsh, who saw that he was no stranger at all, but Inspector Croal, still in the guise of a fish-hawker. The detective gave a rueful little laugh.

"Well, we've had a good race, Mr. Tidmarsh, but neither of us is to pass the winning-post, it seems," said he. "There lies our man, stone dead and safe from both of us."

Mr. Tidmarsh, trembling like an aspen, peered into the blazing room. "He must have upset the table with the lamp, and the lamp burst," he faltered.

"That was it, undoubtedly. In fact, I saw it as I was hurrying to catch you up—to save you from yourself," replied Croal gravely.

"He was drunk, most likely," said Tidmarsh.

"Aye, made so on purpose, so that you should have an easy job of it," was the detective's comment. And then, after dragging the smoking body further from the window, he exclaimed suddenly—

"Curious that he should have been here all alone; yet if any one else had been in the house they'd have shown up before now. You're better posted about that than I am, I expect?"

"Lor' lumme, but I'm forgetting," said Mr. Tidmarsh, half dazed. "There was the gal that

lodged at Bremner's, in Beaker Street—her from the tipster's in Red Lion Court—along with him here, so I was told."

"Then, by heaven! she must be locked in somewhere," cried Croal. "We can't get in this way through the fire. Let's try the doors and search for the girl, for the place is well alight and the roof will be down inside half an hour."

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### WILL THERE BE TIME?

DISAPPOINTED, though not surprised, at finding the window of her new prison guarded from the path below, Nance strained her ears to catch the conversation that was going on. Failing to overhear a single word, she sat down and waited. Brummagem Jem and Ted the Pounder, she told herself, were not the sort of "hardy annuals" to remain watching in the open air all night. Something would happen before then.

Something did happen, of which we already have cognizance. The glow in the southern sky from the rocket suddenly illumined the room, and she caught a glimpse of the streak of fire as it sank behind the tree-tops. Only a faint echo of the commotion produced in the dining-room below reached her, but it was enough to show that the rocket had some sort of significance for her captors.

Then silence supervened, and she ventured to look from the window to see if the pugilists were still on the path below. They were not, but a broad band of light shooting from the French window on the ground floor showed up in clear relief the boots of some one sitting just within the room.

Escape by means of the sturdy ivy stems was not yet practicable. It would be impossible to reach the ground without incurring the observation of the unseen man underneath.

Despair was claiming her again when a strange noise, or, rather, succession of noises, at the door of the room drew her attention. First there was the scrooping of the key as it turned in the lock, presumably unlocking the door, as it had been previously locked. Then followed the turning of the handle in an attempt to enter the room, which was futile, because she had shot the inner bolts. After that the faint drumming of fingers on the panels reached her—probably a request for admission. And, finally, when she met all these advances with absolute silence, the patter of receding footsteps on the landing was distinctly heard.

Ignorant as to who her unknown visitant could be, Nance was congratulating herself on having had the power of keeping him or her from entering, when a novel sound from a fresh direction filled her with a vague thrill of impending change. It was the rumble of carriage wheels from the side of the house, and, running to the window, she was just in time to catch a glimpse of the brougham lamps as the vehicle turned into the drive from the stable-yard.

Could it be that her enemies had evacuated the citadel?

A glance downwards at the protruding boots showed that one at least had been left behind, but, encouraged by the hope that at least the garrison had been weakened, Nance ventured to solve the mystery of the door. Cautiously drawing the bolts, she found that in truth the door had been unlocked and that she was no longer confined to one room.

Half fearful that it might be a trap to lure her to unknown perils, she ran back and procured her hat and stole down the unlighted stairs. The hall also was in darkness, but she shuddered as through the open door of the lamp-lit dining-room she caught sight of the broad back of Hooligan seated at one of the windows. Avoiding the front door, which would have brought her within range of his vision, she groped her way through dank and mouldy passages to a tradesman's entrance in the long-disused servants' quarters. The door, which was the one by which Mother Fury and her companions had beaten a retreat, stood open, and, with a sob of thankfulness, Nance found herself a free woman.

Fearful of surprises, she made her way along the tortuous, overhung drive, and turned into the lane through the iron gates just five minutes before Tidmarsh, and six before Inspector Croal turned out of it. She did not meet them, since they both came from the opposite direction to that towards which she set her face.

For her first thought, now that she had fluttered from the snare, was whether there would be time to warn the people at the training-stable of the scheme for removing Starlight. Nance was a country-bred girl, be it remembered, and having learned the locality of the Rook's Nest from Moses Cohen, she knew that she was five miles from Epsom—a distance which she could cover in an hour on foot, and in less if she could strike the railway and pick up a train.

The dying glow of the sunset in the western sky gave her the points of the compass, and with that knowledge to guide her she took a southerly direction, and by luck hit on the main road which brought her to Sutton. At the station she found that

a train was due for Epsom Downs in ten minutes, and, rejoicing that her money had not been taken from her, she bought a ticket.

In her impatience it seemed ages before the engine lights swung into view, and the moment the train came to a standstill she had hold of a carriage door and leaped in. She had no sooner sank into a seat than the window of the next compartment —a first-class one—was let down, and an authoritative voice called—

"Skinner! Where the deuce are you, Skinner?"

Nance shrank further into her corner. The voice was the voice of her arch-persecutor, Mr. Leopold Tannadyce.

"Confound the beggar! he's missed it somehow, and he promised to meet us here and act as guide," continued the moneylender in his affected drawl. "We shall have to find the stables without him, Bremner. I am glad I took the precaution of coming myself, when I remembered that you had been that girl's landlord. I'll see you don't play hanky-panky."

Nance heard no more, for the train started on again, and the window was pulled up with a bang. The few words she had heard set her heart beating fast. At any rate, she was not as yet too late. If she could give the party the slip at the station she should reach the training stables first by a short time, for she had the advantage of knowing exactly where they were, which did not seem to be the case with the others.

After a short run the train stopped at Belmont Station, and the window of the next compartment was lowered again.

"No; he doesn't seem to be here, sir," said a voice, which Nance recognized as Frank Bremner's.

"Well, keep your head out till the train starts,"

responded the fainter tones of Tannadyce. "He might come up at the last moment."

Nance, with all her faculties alert, realized at once that the moneylender was still expecting the person he had called Skinner to join the party, and had delegated the lawyer's clerk to look out for him. In a second she had decided on a bold course and taken it. She put her head out of the carriage window and, reaching over, touched Bremner on the arm, at the same time imploring his silence by a gesture. It was a necessary precaution, for Bremner started as though he had seen an apparition.

The guard was already waving his lamp to the engine-driver; there was not a moment to spare. "Delay your arrival at the stables as long as possible, but when you get there act entirely on your instructions," she whispered. "Then all will be well."

The train moved on again before Nance could gather whether Bremner in his amazement had fully understood. But she decided to act on the supposition that he had done so and would fall in with her wishes. There was now but one station (Banstead) before the terminus of the branch to Epsom Downs was reached, and her plan was to leave the railway at the former, which was but a few hundred yards further from Barron's stables, and make up for the increased distance by running. By this means she would lessen the probability of being seen by Tannadyce on quitting the train, and if Bremner helped her in the way indicated she ought to arrive at the stables with a little time in hand.

She had hardly matured her programme when the train ran into Banstead Station, and, stepping lightly on to the platform, Nance darted through

the booking-office and out into the road. With a prayer on her lips that she might not have been seen from the first-class compartment, she headed straight for the stables and ran as she had never run in her life before. Her knowledge of the classic Downs, gained in happier days, stood her in good stead, and in something under twenty minutes she was at the great gates of the stable yard.

It was pitch-dark now, but a gas lamp on one of the buildings shed a feeble gleam on the range of stabling and on the trainer's house beyond. The girl's hand was on the iron bell-pull, when two men came out of the stable nearest the gate. One of them remained to lock the stable door, but the other commenced to walk towards the house.

"You've quite made up your mind, then, Sir Charles? I can't persuade you to reconsider it?" said the man with the key.

"No; I've said the last word," returned the other. "I shall put the pen through the colt's name in the morning. It would seem to me sheer heartlessness to run a horse when I am in such terrible doubt and uncertainty about the lady who is my affianced wife."

"It is simply chucking away a fortune—flying slap in the face of Providence," persisted the first speaker.

"I can't help that, Barron, sorry as I am to disappoint you and the colt's other backers. I should never forgive myself if I won a triumph which my darling had died to secure for me. As I have been telling you this evening, it is my belief that she is in a grave peril, if she is still alive, at the instance of the scoundrels whose interest it was to prevent my winning this race."

With which Sir Charles Roylance, who had halted to answer the appeal, turned and continued

his way to the house, leaving the trainer to follow when he had secured the stable door.

Nance's eyes filled with tears at this signal evidence of her lover's devotion. All through those miserable three days she had been wondering how her strange disappearance would affect him, but that he should forego his chance of rehabilitating his fortunes because he feared for her safety thrilled her with the proud conviction that "Charley" was true.

Changing her mind about ringing the bell, she called softly through the bars of the gate to the trainer, who came suspiciously forward. Visitors to the stable at ten o'clock at night were an unheard-of anomaly in the traditions of the establishment.

"For heaven's sake, let me in at once, Mr. Barron," said Nance. "I am Miss Beauchamp—you saw me on the Downs once with Sir Charles, you know. Some people will be here in a few minutes to remove Starlight from your care under legal distraint."

Tom Barron would not have been the great trainer he was if he had not possessed presence of mind. Recognizing the visitor as Sir Charles' companion on the eventful morning of the trial, he admitted her without a moment's hesitation.

"So they're going to distrain on Starlight. That's artful of them," he said, as he relocked the gates.

"Yes, I knew it last Friday, and I should have warned you then if I hadn't been prevented," panted Nance.

"We were only speaking of you a minute back, Miss," said Barron respectfully. "I'm glad you've broken loose, and——"

"Never mind me—that'll keep," Nance inter-

rupted him, and she broke into a concise narrative of the imminent catastrophe that was even now swooping down upon the stable. Barron listened in tense silence, but his shrewd eyes twinkled as she finished.

"There was a talk of scratching the colt just now, but there won't be any need to do that if these sharks take him away from us, will there, Miss?" he said meaningly.

"I—I hope not. I have fought so hard for that horse, Mr. Barron," Nance faltered.

"I know you have," assented the trainer warmly. "Sir Charles, who is staying here to-night, has been telling me about it, but we mustn't stand here talking when we ought to be preparing to receive the representatives of the law. There is no time to explain matters to Sir Charles, so if you will kindly step this way I will find a snug hiding-place for you in the hay-loft while I ready Starlight for his journey. It wouldn't do for the plunderers to know that *you* had been here."

And Mr. Barron winked solemnly as he unlocked the stable again and passed in, followed by the bringer of the tidings.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### TANNADYCE'S TRIUMPH

IN the meanwhile Sir Charles Roylance was pacing up and down in the trainer's parlour wondering why his host was so long in rejoining him. He looked years older than when we saw him last, the loss of his staunch little sweetheart having wrought a change in him which no financial troubles had ever been able to effect.

Inspector Croal had proved a broken reed. That officer's confident assurance of being able to trace Nance by keeping observation on Tannadyce had yielded no results, and for the past twenty-four hours the young baronet had seen nothing of his detective ally. In his despair he had come down to Epsom to tell his trainer that he had not the heart to run Starlight on the morrow, and he had accepted the offer of a bed which Tom had made in the straw-clutching hope of inducing his favourite patron to reconsider his decision.

It was a quarter of an hour before Barron came in with vague excuses for keeping his guest waiting —excuses which were cut short as soon as begun by the sonorous clanging of the yard bell. He uttered an exclamation of annoyed surprise that any one should disturb the establishment so late.

"All the lads are gone to bed; I must go myself and see who it is," he said, leaving the room hurriedly.

In restless mood Sir Charles followed him to the house door and watched him cross the yard to the big gates, through which the figures of three men were dimly visible. The trainer had no sooner reached the gate than a heated altercation ensued, which tempted Sir Charles to stroll over to the group. On his nearing them Barron turned to him in a white heat of indignation.

"Here's a bit of cheek!" he spluttered. "Three d——d process-servers come to collar your colt Starlight under a judgment, they say."

"Oh, is that Sir Charles Roylance?" crackled the sharp metallic tones of one of those outside. "Good evening, Sir Charles. You'll have more sense than this firebrand, I expect. He hardly seems to realize the consequences of obstructing us. Be good enough to ask him to allow the law to take its course."

His enemy's voice came to Starlight's harassed owner like a gust of fresh air or a bracing tonic.

"Let them in, Tom," he said with quiet scorn. "That is, when they have shown their authority. I wouldn't take that Jew's word for anything."

Showing his teeth in an ugly grin, but repressing a retort, Tannadyce bade Bremner and the sheriff's officer produce the necessary documents. The latter were in undoubted order, and, having inspected them through the bars by the light of his lantern, Barron, with every show of reluctance, unfastened the gate. As the trio passed in he eyed them with an insolent stare of affected pity.

"By Jingo! but you're a rummy lot to fetch a thoroughbred colt away," he murmured as they filed by him. "You won't know which end to

begin, I'm thinking, and you'll be a pretty sick crowd by the time he's done with you."

"We'll manage," said Tannadyce shortly. "Where's the horse?"

Grumbling in no unmeasured language, the trainer led the way to the stable and unlocked it, the distraining party following close on his heels, and Sir Charles bringing up the rear with the air of a disinterested spectator.

"There! I've given you access to the horse. You can't expect me to point him out to you," said Barron with a hostile laugh.

But Tannadyce was in no way put out by his ill-humour. After one comprehensive look round the interior of the building he beckoned his companions and marched straight between the rows of loose boxes to the end one, over which the name "Starlight" was affixed in enamelled letters.

"Ah! but you're well posted. I see now what that snivelling rascal who came to apply for a job here was after the other day," exclaimed Barron with bitter emphasis.

Taking no notice of him, the moneylender entered the box with his assistants, and after a wary approach to the great raking chestnut with the conspicuous white star, succeeded in getting its head into the halter which his foresight had provided. Tossing the end of the rope to Frank Bremner, who was looking heartily ashamed of himself, he bade him lead the horse out.

"There! I think we may take credit for having performed an unpleasant business with courtesy and expedition," said Tannadyce, with a sinister glance at the baronet who had preserved his unmoved demeanour.

Leaning against a corn bin, Sir Charles let his gaze follow the animal as it walked proudly to the

door in the clumsy grip of the lawyer's clerk. "A very unnecessary business, if your object was to prevent Starlight winning his race to-morrow," he said quietly.

"You have lost faith in his chance? Or else the grapes are conveniently sour?" sneered Tannadyce. As men ever hate those whom they injure, so he hated the well-born victim of his rapacity, desiring that he should drink the bitter cup to the dregs. He would have preferred to leave Starlight's owner in the belief that in losing the horse he had lost a certain win.

"On the contrary, I am more confident than ever that if he had started he would have won with ease. But, as Mr. Barron will bear me out, I had decided not to run him," said Sir Charles coldly.

"Oh! then you were forestalled after all by the 'machinations,' as I think you called them, of 'Parker's Lightning Finals,' and the mysterious sleeping partner whom you did me the honour to identify with myself," said Tannadyce, unable in his elation to resist the thrust.

"Again on the contrary, I have backed Starlight to win a sum which would free me from your usurious clutches for ever. My reason for deciding to scratch the colt is one which would be absolutely unintelligible to your Semitic mind," was the baronet's reply, uttered with a studied contempt that goaded Tannadyce to retaliation.

"Oh, come; you'll never cram me with the notion that you meant to stand out of a big win because of that girl from 'Parker's,'" he hissed through his white teeth. "You can make your mind easy about her. I got the tip about her this afternoon. She went off with Lord Hooligan—you know the beauty I mean—to a little place he'd taken on purpose near Mitcham Junction, and I

should imagine she's not worth looking for by now."

It was only the lash of Sir Charles's scorn that could have stung him to a rejoinder so sure of retribution, for he was always careful of his skin. But it was not his victim's swiftly raised hand that was to punish the brutal speech. Tom Barron, who had been nervously casting furtive glances at the hay-loft trap-door during Tannadyce's vile assertion, sprang forward, and with a mighty kick projected the slanderer three parts of the way to the stable door—out of reach of the baronet's descending fist.

"No need for you to soil yourself by touching such as him, Sir Charles," cried the angry trainer. "Shoe-leather is good enough for the likes of him." And with another apprehensive backward glance at the loft, he followed the moneylender up so threateningly that in less than ten seconds the three intruders and the horse were outside the yard gates.

Tom Barron stood and watched them through the bars till they had dwindled to a brown patch on the white chalk streak of moonlit road; then he locked the gates and returned to the stable, from the door of which Sir Charles was just emerging.

"Thank you, Barron," he said wearily. "That kick of yours is something on the right side of the balance-sheet, anyhow."

"Keep a good courage, sir," cried the trainer, pushing past him into the building with less than his usual ceremony. Sir Charles watched him in mild surprise as he raised his lantern to the trap-door in the ceiling, whence a ladder ran down to the floor.

Even when honest Tom called out: "Coast's clear, Miss," he did not begin to understand till a pair of dainty ankles appeared on the ladder,

followed by a slight girlish figure that drew from him the glad cry of—

"Nance? My Nance?"

"Charley!" was the single word, full of a thousand meanings, with which she flung herself into her lover's outstretched arms.

When she had told in a few breathless sentences all she knew of her capture and escape the trainer interrupted with a respectful suggestion that they should adjourn to the house.

"You did brave work when you brought warning of what that rascal Jew was up to, Miss," was Mr. Barron's admiring comment as he piloted the way across the yard. "But in my humble judgment you did a braver when you kept quiet in the hay loft under all that calumny. I was in mortal fear lest you'd show up, just to give him the lie, and so blow on the deal."

"What deal?" asked Sir Charles innocently. "I rather wish you *had* shown yourself, darling, and crammed the lie down his throat in person. I can't see that it would have mattered, as he has got Starlight in spite of your plucky attempt to warn us."

"Tell me, Charley," said Nance, linking her arm in her lover's, "now that I am safe, Starlight's removal is a real blow to you? I mean that *now* you would not have adhered to that chivalrous idea of scratching him?"

"Thank heaven, there is now no need for what you are pleased to call my chivalry," said the young man warmly. "Certainly I should have run the horse if he had remained in my hands under present circumstances."

At these simple words Tom Barron's weather-beaten face creased into a grin, and he broke into a prolonged chuckle.

"There you are, Miss," he said, as he ushered them into his cosy parlour. "That bears out what I told you—that the deal would be a sight more satisfactory with you hidden in the hay-loft."

"What deal?" asked Sir Charles once more. But all he could get just then, either from his trainer or from his sweetheart, was an interchange between the two of mysterious nods and winks, and, on Barron's part, occasional convulsions of silent laughter.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### THE MAN WHO KNEW

HAVING found a candle in the hall, Inspector Croal and Mr. Tidmarsh, allies now instead of rivals, lost no time in pursuing their vain quest for Nance Beauchamp in the upper floor of the Rook's Nest. In fact, there was no time to lose if they were to make good their own escape, for the worm-eaten old mansion was thoroughly ablaze, and no assistance for extinguishing it was at hand. Not till the flames broke over the tree-tops would the fire be observed from outside, and in that rural district some delay would occur before the first brigade could arrive.

The detective opened door after door without result, and Billy woke the echoes of the deserted house with his powerful lungs, but to no purpose. It was not till they came to the little back room with the barred window over the kitchens that Croal gave signs of having made a discovery. Here he ran about like a foxhound in covert, poking and prying everywhere.

"The girl has been here!" he exclaimed. "This is where they kept her, sure enough. The room has been recently occupied, though for some reason there has been an attempt to make it look as if it

hadn't been. The washstand has been cleaned up, but they've forgotten to tidy the toilet table. See, here's a twist of hair-combings on the pincushion."

"And there's bars to the window," suggested Tidmarsh.

"Exactly, my excellent amateur, and I want you to take particular notice of these things, because all this evidence is in a fair way to be destroyed by fire in half an hour," said the inspector. "By George!" he added, "look at this, too! There's been shooting." And he pointed to the splintered door-post caused by Mother Fury's bullet when keeping Hooligan at bay.

"Perhaps they've murdered the gal," was Tidmarsh's gloomy suggestion.

"Very likely, and if they have, her blood will be on your head for not informing me of what you knew," was Croal's not very comforting rejoinder. "But come along," he added, touched by the piteous expression on the bookmaker's huge face, "the smoke's getting a bit too thick up here. Its time we were outside."

Descending the servants' staircase they went out of the back door and round to the front of the house, where the flames were now in undisputed possession of the whole ground floor. Croal glanced at Hooligan's blackened corpse, lying where he had dragged it on the verge of the shubbery, and was proposing to start off in search of assistance when he suddenly gripped Tidmarsh by the arm and pulled him into the shadow of the trees.

Pid-pad, pid-pad towards them along the drive could be heard the steps of some one running—not strongly, but with the feeble gait of one well-nigh spent by the exertion. In another moment old Moses Cohen appeared within the glare of the flames and ambled straight for the open hall-door, heedless

of the furnace rioting within. Before he could enter, Croal's hand fell lightly but firmly on his shoulder.

"Why, what's this?" said the detective. "Blessed if it isn't the man in possession at Bremner's, whom I played doctor to the other day. What are you doing here, daddy?"

The old man looked up at him, not recognizing the "City merchant" who had bound up his burns a week ago. It was at once evident to the skilled tracker of crime that there was no sign of guilt in the aged face—only an overwhelming anxiety, amounting almost to frenzy.

"Let me go in!" he besought. "I must see if the Beautiful Miss is safe."

"There isn't a living soul in the house. We have been through it from end to end," replied the inspector.

"You tried that front bedroom over the dining-room?" quavered the old man.

"Yes. And she was not there."

"Ah, then heaven has been merciful, and she fled when I unlocked her door."

"But why that front bedroom?" Croal asked with renewed interest. "I found traces of her in a little room at the back—a room with a barred window. Come, Mr. Cohen, you had better explain what you know of this matter and answer my question how you came to be mixed up in it. And before you begin, let me inform you that I am a police officer."

"So much the better; there'll be work for you before the thing is finished," the ancient Jew responded with a harsh cackle of laughter. "If I can help you to put the shining bracelets on the smooth white wrists of him who wrought all his trouble, I shall not fail you. Ah!" he interrupted

himself as his eyes fell on Hooligan's cindered body, "that evil-doer has gone to his judgment. Yet he, too, with all his sins, was a victim—sacrificed on the altar of a great scoundrel's sin."

So Moses Cohen told how he had feared that his son, Leopold Tennadyce, meant harm to the "Beautiful Miss," and how he had taken into his feeble hands the task of protecting the girl who had soothed and comforted him. On the day when the moneylender and Hooligan had first gone down to the Rook's Nest he had travelled by the same train, being suspicious of their motives, and had learned from the flyman who had driven them from Mitcham Station, whither they were bound.

On that occasion he had returned to London without going to the lonely mansion, but two days later an irresistible impulse seized him to go down again and ascertain if he was right in the conviction that the visit to the secluded house covered some evil design against Miss Beauchamp.

He had been prowling round the outhouses when he was seized by Hooligan at the housekeeper's instigation and thrust into the coal-shed, from which he had nearly succeeded in escaping through the roof when he was detected next morning. On being recognized by one of the hired ruffians who had abducted Nance, the idea had occurred to him of posing as his son's confederate, so as to gain his liberty and bring aid.

In this he had been prevented, owing to Tannadyce's stringent orders that there should be no communication with the outside world; but he had been allowed the run of the place, and had been able eventually to set the prisoner free by running up and unlocking the door amid the confusion caused by the signal for departure.

"But what was the gist of it all? What was

their game with the young lady ? " Croal inquired.

" She was to be so compromised by her supposed willing flight with that wretched creature that an honourable gentleman who loves her would cast her off," was the reply, accompanied by a gesture towards the corpse.

" Ah, I begin to see daylight," said Croal. " That was why they moved her at the last moment to a room where there would have been no corroboration of her story that she was detained by force, eh ? "

" I gathered as much ; also that some man was expected to come and kill Mr. Hooly as soon as they had left," said Cohen. " In the scandal that was to ensue, my miserable son, knowing that the girl was really pure and unsullied, was to appear to champion her cause, and hoped to win her hand by so doing. If, however, she did not consent, the coloured woman was to put the blackest construction on her stay here. It was expected that the girl, hearing Mr. Hooly attacked by the murderer, would not attempt to escape from the room, but would be found on the premises when the alarm was raised."

" But how about the locked door ? " snapped Croal. " That would have given it away that she was a prisoner ? "

" Not so," Moses Cohen replied. " The wiles of these people were infinite. The key having been removed, the coloured woman was prepared to swear, if necessary, that it had been in Miss Beauchamp's possession—that she had locked the door for fear of the murderer, on the inside."

" And where is this precious gang of rascals gone to ? "

" The two men are driving the carriage back to London, and the woman and I got out at Mitcham," the old man answered. " They believed that I was about to return to town by train, but I hurried

back to see if the Beautiful Miss had discovered and taken advantage of the unlocking of her door. The woman, I understood, was to return here later, pretending to have been out for an evening's shopping."

"What state was the person you call Hooly in when you left?"

"Very drunk," replied Cohen. "They made him drunk on purpose, so that he should be unable to resist his assailant."

"A nice sort of butcher's job you have missed," said Croal in a grim aside to the still trembling Tidmarsh.

"I was mad," groaned Tidmarsh. "I might have known that the Lord's vengeance was not to be worked off by the likes of me. "There's the other one, too—him as fired the rocket—struck down by Providence."

And, remembering that in the excitement of the fire he had forgotten to inform the detective of Skinner's accident, he rectified the omission, describing the groom's confession of complicity with his master and the promise to make a clean breast of it.

"By George, then we've got Leo Tannadyce in a ring-fence," exclaimed Croal. "Now you can atone for your previous errors by making yourself useful. The house is doomed, but we must make a show of stopping the fire; so cut along and rouse up some help. I'll wait here with Cohen, and welcome this interesting mulatto lady when she returns from her 'shopping' expedition."

Long before the nearest fire brigade rattled up the drive, Mother Fury came round the bend, her string bag crammed with trivial purchases. The glow in the sky over the trees had caused her to hurry as soon as she passed through the gates, so

that she was not wholly surprised on coming into view of the burning house. She jumped to the conclusion that Tidmarsh had been there and had set fire to the place to hide the traces of his revenge—or possibly as a means of attaining it.

Her callous heart felt no qualms for the innocent girl whom she believed to have been locked in the bedroom now belching tongues of fire. All she was concerned with was to weigh the pros and cons of this new development as regards its effect on the paymaster. If Nance Beauchamp had perished, it would simplify her task of shedding a false light on the nature of the girl's stay at the Rook's Nest; on the other hand, Tannadyce had given strict orders that no bodily harm was to befall the captive, and she feared he would not be pleased with this dénouement. He had hinted that his object was to force Miss Beauchamp into a marriage with him, and a calcined bride would upset his calculations.

The yellow hag walked into the circle of the glare and stood gazing curiously at the blazing pile.

"I'd better go and telegraph for the engines," she muttered. "I must do whatever would seem most natural at the inquiry."

She turned away with that purpose, only to be confronted by Inspector Croal, who had stepped into the bushes on her approach.

"Good evening, madam," he said quietly. "Are you a resident in this house?"

She took him, in his disreputable garb, for the author of the mischief—for the unknown who, in the phraseology of her late associates, was expected to "settle Hooly's hash." Her warped mind had an affinity for anything criminal, so she answered civilly enough:

"Yes; I've been living here as caretaker. Do you know how it happened?"

"I know to a tick. I was on the spot when it began."

She was assured now that her conjecture was correct. "Tell me," she said with a wicked leer into the detective's face, "is the gentleman dead?"

"There he lies," replied Croal sternly, pointing to the blackened thing at the verge of the coppice. "And it is my duty to inform you that I am a police-officer and that you are my prisoner."

"Bah! what for?" cried Mother Fury impudently. But her ochreous skin took a green tinge in the dancing flame-light.

"On a charge of forcible abduction first, which may resolve itself into murder," said Croal gravely. "When a conspiracy to compass the death of a man ends in that man's death, it is murder in law."

"You've got a goodish lot to prove," Mother Fury sneered.

"And a goodish witness to do so," was the quick retort. "Stand forth, Mr. Cohen."

Then only, when the monkey-like figure of the old Jew came hopping from the shrubbery into the glare of the flames, did that ruthless heart quail. Beside himself with joy at the confusion of the persecutrix of his "Beautiful Miss," Moses capered like an aged gnome in the lurid light, mouthing and gibbering inarticulate accusations, while Mother Fury held out her wrists in sullen despair for her handcuffs.

For Moses Cohen was *the man who knew*.

## CHAPTER XL

### BEFORE THE START

FINE and bright dawned the day for the decision of the New Century Handicap at Sandown Park.

On the whole, Mr. Leopold Tannadyce was well pleased with himself as he sat at breakfast on the morning after his raid on Tom Barron's stables. In spite of the trainer's warnings, he and his companions had experienced no difficulty in conducting the occupant of Box No. 10 to Epsom town, where he was housed at a livery stable in charge of the sheriff's officer.

After that, he and Bremner had returned to London by the last train, though not in the same compartment. At Waterloo, however, the lawyer's clerk accosted him as he was getting into a cab.

"I beg pardon, sir, but I should be deeply grateful if you would let me have a line to Messrs. Nathan to say that I have given you satisfaction in managing the distraint to-night," had been Bremner's request.

"Certainly, my good fellow," Tannadyce had responded with his patronizing air, pencilling a scrawl on a leaf from his pocket-book.

"And if you wouldn't mind putting in a word for me to have a day off to-morrow, I should dearly like to see the big race," Bremner had added meekly.

"With Starlight left out of it," Tannadyce had laughed, and, elated by what he considered a good night's work, he had appended to his scrawl a request that the bearer might have a holiday as a reward for his intelligent conduct of the legal process entrusted to him.

And now, as he poured a costly liqueur into his coffee and toyed with his devilled kidneys, there was but one crumpled roseleaf in the great money-lender's heap. Skinner had not reported himself after his expedition to give the signal for the evacuation of the Rook's Nest. There was nothing that should have kept him in Surrey, for he had been specially charged not to go near the scene of Tidmarsh's expected crime, and he should have reached his quarters at the mews overnight.

However, Tannadyce was content to await the solution of his groom's absence with perfect confidence that no hitch had occurred in the programme. If it had, the astute Skinner would have communicated with him long ere this, he assured himself. Circumstances had doubtless arisen which had necessitated caution—possibly a long detour—in returning from the scene of his labours.

So it was that when noon came and brought no Skinner, Tannadyce did not allow his servant's absence to stand in the way of a little plan he had formed for enjoying the downfall of Sir Charles Roylance to the full. It was one of the ingrained attributes of the usurer to derive pleasure from the misfortunes of others, especially if they were brought about by himself, and ever since he had devised the scheme for depriving the young baronet of his "crack," he had promised himself the exquisite delight of seeing the New Century Handicap run and won without Starlight figuring in the race.

On the spot there were a hundred ways in which

his triumph would be rendered sweeter. After what had happened it was hardly likely that Sir Charles would be on the course himself, but there would be the pitying remarks of his friends and associates, as well as the abuse of his enemies, to listen to, while the comments of the multitude on the ruin of a popular favourite would be as music in his ears. Yes, he would go and spend a happy afternoon at Sandown Park, and perhaps before he returned to the Metropolis in the evening he would have derived an additional sauce for a good dinner from the evening newspapers. It was to them that he looked for the first news of the tragedy at the Rook's Nest, for he had forbidden his myrmidons to lay a train of future clues by communicating with him direct, and whatever had happened would have been too late for mention in the morning journals.

Having finished his most pressing business, he drove to Waterloo and got into one of the racing specials that were starting in quick succession for the famous "slopes of Esher." There was very little time to spare, but seeing by a commotion at the bookstall that the earliest evening papers had just been delivered, he could not resist the temptation of darting across to procure a copy. The train began to move as he resumed his seat, and he was too interested in what the paper might or might not contain to notice the other occupants of the compartment then, further than that it had filled up during his brief absence.

Unfolding the paper, he found what he sought amid the latest intelligence on the centre page, in all the distinction of heavily leaded type under the blocked headline :

"MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCE IN SURREY.
"DEATH OF A WELL-KNOWN NOBLEMAN.

"As we go to press news comes to hand that Lord Hooligan was discovered burned to death late last night in a house known as the Rook's Nest, not far from Mitcham Junction. We understand that the body was found still burning, but with life extinct, by an officer of the Criminal Investigation Department who had proceeded to the house for the purpose of executing a warrant againt the deceased peer on a very serious charge connected with the death of a once-celebrated music-hall artist on Epsom Downs. We shall hope to give further particulars in our later editions."

The damp sheet concealed the eager reader's face, or his fellow-passengers might have been startled by the satanic leer that welcomed the brief report.

"So the man of vengeance got in his work only just in time to dish the detective," muttered Tannadyce, with a sigh of relief. "There's no mention of other fatalities, so presumably my fair young antagonist escaped with her life and a damaged reputation. Well, she'll have to learn her lesson—that those who will not bend I break."

He dropped the paper on his knee, and sat for a time looking dreamily out of the window as the train rushed through the squalid approaches of the terminus. He was out of his element, somewhat, in a carriage full of professional racing men; their scarcely intelligible jargon bored him, and, as it was not the "members' special" conveying the aristocracy of the Turf, there was no inducement to scrape acquaintance with the passengers on the chance of picking up new clients.

But presently his eyes tired of the vista of drab

walls and chimney pots, and he let his eyes roam lazily round the compartment. His nearest neighbours were obviously of the class known as "professional backers," while a well-dressed, sharp-featured youth in the seat opposite had the dreamy eye and studiously abstracted gaze which inspire the initiated with care for watch and scarf-pin. But these types of racecourse habitués only claimed the moneylender's glance as it passed on to be caught and chained by two men seated facing each other at the far end of the compartment.

One of them was Frank Bremner, evidently bent on the enjoyment of the holiday which he himself had procured for him, and therefore not a cause of anything but momentary surprise. But the *vis-à-vis* of the lawyer's clerk was no less a personage than the vengeful bookmaker whom he believed to have been engaged on a murderous enterprise the night before—Tidmarsh, a little chastened and subdued perhaps, but showing none of the tremors to be expected in the chief actor in that scene of blood and fire.

"Egad, what a nerve the chap must have!—like his victim, quite an interesting study in methods of violence," was Tannadyce's mental comment on the man whom he had, through Skinner, enlisted as his unwitting tool.

But he soon became conscious of the disposition on the part of Tidmarsh to avoid his half-admiring gaze. It required not a tithe of his acumen to perceive that both Billy and his friend were aware of his presence in the carriage, and that they had been influenced by it to a constrained silence and the interchange of meaning glances. This attitude caused the schemer a qualm of uneasiness, for, though he could not believe that Tidmarsh, with his neck almost in the rope, had confided his exploit

to Nathan's smart understrapper, it looked as though they had been discussing him together.

Well, it didn't matter, he told himself. He had always expected, in the probable event of Tidmarsh's arrest for killing Lord Hooligan, that his own part in enlightening him as to that nobleman's whereabouts would come out, and he was prepared with an explanation. He would say that he had acted as he had in the belief that Tidmarsh, being the proper person to do so, would inform the police, and without any expectation that he would take the law into his own hands. His own reticence to Croal he would gloss over by a gentlemanly reluctance to inform directly against a man with whom he had been acquainted.

The same aloofness was preserved by the pair during the rest of the journey, and at Esher Station they clearly delayed quitting the train in order to let him get ahead of them. For all that, he felt intuitively that they were not far behind as he walked up to the racecourse, and he had hardly passed the turnstile into the half-guinea enclosure when he saw them entering the same point of vantage for viewing the sport.

The bookmaker evidently had no intention of plying his calling, for instead of selecting a "pitch" he wandered restlessly about the enclosure, talking in earnest undertones to Bremner.

Dismissing them from his mind as harmless items unworthy to spoil the greatest day in his calendar—the day which was to confirm his hold on Roylance Abbey—Tannadyce bought a race-card and studied it eagerly. The first race, a five-furlong scurry of no importance, was run almost immediately; the second, set down for two o'clock, had no interest for him; but the third event, dignified with an hour's interval, was the New Century Handicap.

It gave him quite a little turn to see that "*Sir Charles Roylance's chestnut colt Starlight, 4 yrs., 6st., cerise jacket and silver cap,*" was coloured Number 7 on the card; but a moment's reflection told him that the official programme must have gone to press overnight—about the time when he was removing the horse from the trainer's.

Through the railings he could see the fashionable crowd of society celebrities, male and female, in the members' enclosure, but frequent sweepings of the brilliant throng with his raceglasses failed to reveal Sir Charles Roylance, who had doubtless elected to hide his diminished head elsewhere.

The second race thundered by, and then the serious business of the day began in the post-betting on the great handicap Almost as soon as the leather-lunged orators of the ring opened their books on the race, Tannadyce was startled by the cry from one of them:

"Here, who'll back Starlight? I'll lay 100 to 7 Sir Charles Roylance's colt."

Tannadyce walked straight up to the man and asked, "He's a non-starter, isn't he?"

The bookmaker, who happened to be a noted "penciller," flashed an angry glance at him, resenting the reflection on his fair dealing. "The horse isn't scratched, anyhow," he snapped. "Perhaps you know more than's good for you, Mr. Sheeny."

Tannadyce slunk away abashed, amid the jeers of the bystanders, and his discomfiture, due to ignorance of racecourse amenities, was increased by seeing Tidmarsh and Bremner watching him from a little distance with open amusement.

He tried to comfort himself that Starlight being still in the betting meant nothing more than that Sir Charles, in his distress, had omitted to go through the formality of scratching the horse. Very likely

the baronet had bolted. Anyhow, the price offered was many points lower than what had prevailed on the previous day—a sure sign that the ring had got wind of "something wrong."

This was borne out by scraps of conversation overheard as he walked about. The rumours were all conflicting, but they agreed that, for some not clearly defined reason, Starlight would not face the post. One or two of the gossips openly asserted that the horse had been "taken for debt," and Tannadyce perceived that the sheriff's officer had not been silent as to the identity of his charge at the livery stable. More significant than all the rumours was the steady decline of the horse in the betting.

"Two ponies to a pound Starlight!" yelled a bookmaker at Tannadyce's elbow.

The moneylender chuckled at this knock-out to 50 to 1, but directly afterwards he received a shock. Looking round he saw Tidmarsh, a backer for once hand a five-pound note to the bookmaker.

"For Starlight," he said, and when he had received his ticket Bremner followed suit with a sovereign.

"They must be crazy," murmured the interested spectator of the transaction, but from that moment he was seized with a strange disquiet, and when at length the bell rang to clear the course he hurried to a place whence he could see the telegraph board with the list of starters. He cursed the attendant for his slowness in attaching the figured discs, and then when the frame was hoisted he cursed again in an agony of wondering doubt.

For, sure enough, there was Number 7, and opposite to it was the name of the eminent jockey who always had the first mount for Barron's stable.

Tannadyce turned wildly and accosted the nearest

spectator, who happened to be a professional backer throughly " in the know."

" Is not that—er—a mistake to put up Number 7 ? I thought—I mean I was told—that Starlight was not going to run," he stammered.

" There's been a lot of talk about the horse all the morning, but he's a starter all right, and if you ask me he's got an uncommon good chance," was the reply. And suddenly raising his glasses, the sportsman added, " See, there he comes from the saddling paddock. His owner and trainer are leading him out for the preliminary canter."

Tannadyce's gaze followed in the same direction. What magic was this ? There, just curvetting on to the course, came a great raking chestnut with a white blaze on his forehead, ridden by a jockey wearing the cerise jacket and silver cap which were the Roylance colours ; while, if any further identification were needed, Sir Charles, walking confidently on one side of him, and Tom Barron, grim and sphinx-like on the other, were there to furnish it.

And still more ominous rose the altered shout from the betting ring : " Three to one Starlight."

The horse which Tannadyce believed to be meekly standing in a livery stable in charge of a sheriff's officer was not only a starter, but had leaped in the space of five minutes from the position of a rank outsider to that of second favourite.

What could it mean ?

## CHAPTER XLI

### THE FINISH

"WHAT does it mean?"

In his amazement Tannadyce had unconsciously spoken the question aloud.

"It means, I reckon, that some swindling Jew tried to round up Roylance by distraining on the colt, but got gammoned with the wrong horse by that wily old fox Barron," replied the stranger to whom he had appealed. "Twenty different stories were flying round in town this morning, but I expect you'll find that's about the size of it."

With parched lips Tannadyce tried to murmur thanks, but utterance failed him, and he moved away. It was quite likely that Barron would have done as his informant suggested, and changed Starlight's stall if he could have had warning, but that seemed impossible. He had hedged his design in with so much secrecy, confiding in none but his legal advisers, that the leakage seemed little short of miraculous.

Bremner, it was true, had had it in his power to give him away, but he knew that Messrs. Nathan had only instructed their clerk at the last moment, and he himself had taken the precaution of accompanying the process-servers to the stables. It did

not occur to the distracted plotter that the germ of his undoing was to be found in Tidmarsh's presence in Nathan's ante-room during the concoction of the vile scheme.

However the breakdown had come to pass, there remained now but one chance for him to gain his ends, and that chance seemed by no means hopeless. Starlight would have to run, but that didn't mean that he would win, and Tannadyce began to feverishly scan the list of runners on his card. There was Minster, first favourite at 5 to 4, then Starlight, at 3 to 1, Fortune's Glass at 5 to 1, and nine others, all with a first-class record to recommend them. No, it would be crass folly to throw up the sponge yet, with all that array of splendid horseflesh to depend on, and in more sanguine mood he chose a place close to the rails whence to witness the struggle.

In a brilliant cluster the horses cantered by to the starting-post, and there followed a wait which seemed interminable to the money-lender, jammed in the mass of perspiring humanity. The place he occupied was nearly opposite the winning-post, so he would know the result as soon as any one, yet Fate seemed to be distilling each second of time with galling slowness, as though from a dropping bottle. He felt, with all his cynicism, as if he could have screamed aloud with irritation.

At last the cry of "They're off!" rent the air; the thunder of the ring was hushed; and for a quarter of a minute there reigned an intense silence which imperceptibly grew into a faint murmur, and gradually rose in crescendo scale to a continuous inarticulate roar as the horses rounded the bend into the straight.

Tannadyce strained his gaze up the course, but to his unpractised eyes all was a confused blur

gaudy jackets, waving arms, and great brown bodies hurtling through the air. He had to depend on the comments of more experienced racegoers near him for an idea of what was happening, and the first shouts reassured him.

"Minster leads by half a length from Triton. Good old Minster!" yelled a voice in one ear.

"Fortune's Glass has them safe! See, he's creeping up next the rails," piped another.

But a third shout from one more sharp-sighted than the rest rang out with the decree of doom, "No, Fortune's Glass is done!" And with a mighty shout as the hoof-beats tore towards them, the keen-eyed spectator added, "'Tain't either of 'em! Starlight's coming through the lot like a hot knife through a pat of butter! Starlight does the trick! Starlight wins in a canter!"

And the drums of Tannadyce's ears seemed to burst under the one culminating shout from five thousand throats—

"Starlight! Starlight's won!"

Yes; Starlight had won, and Tannadyce knew that he had won, for the chestnut colt had made such a gallant fight that the cerise jacket and silver cap had flashed past the winning-post a length and a half ahead of Minster, with Triton a bad third. No shadow of room for doubt was there. His own greedy eyes had been informed by the victorious Roylance colours that Roylance Abbey never could be his.

Somehow he found himself borne along in the excited crowd that debouched on to the course to cheer the winner on his way to the weighing-room, and the surging tide swept him close to the horse that he had thought to have "made safe" the night before. Tom Barron, as inscrutable in the hour of triumph as in defeat, already had hold of Star-

light's bridle to lead him in, when Sir Charles, debonair and smiling, came out of the members' enclosure and relieved him of the pleasant task.

The sight goaded Tannadyce to unrestrained fury. He had followed to the entrance of the alley to the weighing-room between the enclosures when he lost control of himself.

"Sir Charles Roylance!" he called out.

The baronet wheeled round, his hand on Starlight's snaffle.

"I protest against your right to run that horse. I had a legal claim on him which I—which I intended to exercise."

"Yes, but you didn't exercise it," replied Sir Charles cheerily. "You exercised it on an old chestnut plater that's seen better days."

"You didn't find the blaze on his forehead come off on your coat, did you?" snapped Tom Barron, his eyes twinkling.

"Oh, then you admit the deception?" the angry schemer snarled.

"Not a bit of it; we admit nothing," said Sir Charles. "You came to the stables and took away which horse you pleased. You didn't ask us whether Starlight was occupying his own stall that night. I shall be quite prepared to contest the point whenever you choose to raise it." And slightly raising his hat, he terminated the scene by leading his horse on to the weighing-room.

But the crowd, already primed by rumour, had begun to piece the situation together, and, realizing that this was the West End Shark who had tried to take a mean advantage of the popular owner, emitted an ominous growl. One excited backer raised his cane and, twitching off the usurer's glossy silk hat, sent it spinning among the sea of heads. Others assumed a menacing attitude, and commenced

hustling him along the course till their attention was distracted by a stentorian cry of—

"Here you are at last, inspector! I've kept my eye on him, but there won't be much left but pieces in a minute."

"Now, gentlemen, please. Leave him to me, if you will be so kind," came the authoritative but pacifying tones of Mr. Croal, as he shouldered his way alongside under the protection of Mr. Tidmarsh's huge bulk. "I am a police-officer, and I want him myself."

The hot, flushed faces fell away, leaving the detective confronted with the hunted wretch. Croal was a kindly man, justly celebrated for the suavity of his manner in making arrests, but he could not force politeness to this double-dyed traitor who had plotted against the life of his accomplice, and the fair fame of an innocent girl.

"You are my prisoner, Mr. Tannadyce," he said sternly. "You know the formula which it is my duty to put—anything you may say will be used against you."

"I shan't say anything except to ask a question," returned the usurer, his sallow face working convulsively. "What is the charge?"

"Conspiracy—to procure the death of your friend Lord Hooligan, and to forcibly detain Miss Beauchamp at the Rook's Nest," was the reply.

"Bah! Croal, you'll regret this," said Tannadyce, a gleam of hope illuminating the ghastly pallor of his face. "Of course, I must go with you if you have a warrant, but there stands the man who ought to be in custody for Hooligan's death."

He pointed at the impassive Tidmarsh, who only broke into a vast smile of content at the thought of what might have been.

"I warned you not to commit yourself," said

Croal. "That statement practically incriminates you, for Mr. Tidmarsh is the person whom you will be charged with indirectly inciting to murder. Fortunately for him, I am in a position to swear that he did not cause Lord Hooligan's death, which was directly due to the acts of your accomplices."

"My accomplices?" faltered the accused.

"Yes; Birmingham Jem, Ted the Pounder, a woman known as Mother Fury, and your own servant Alfred Skinner, the latter of whom has this morning given me every information," the inspector replied. "Come, sir. They're going to clear the course for the next race, and we're blocking the gangway. I must trouble you, please."

There was no mistaking the demand, accompanied by the sudden gleam of a pair of handcuffs. Tannadyce shuddered, but reluctantly held out his wrists. There was a jingle and a snap, and amid the renewed execrations of the throng, Croal conducted his prisoner off the course towards the railway station.

Mr. Tidmarsh and Frank Bremner followed as far as the park gates, when the bookmaker extracted a ten-pound note from his pocket-book and solemnly handed it to his friend.

"There's the tenner I laid you against Starlight," he said gravely. "It's the last race I shall ever pay out over, for I've done with this game for ever. I shall have to find silk skirts for my old Dutch some other way."

## CHAPTER XLII

### AFTER MUCH TRIBULATION

THREE months have passed, and once again we are at Barfield-on-Thames, amid the peaceful stillness of a fine afternoon. Summer tints have given place to autumn shades, and from the close-reaped brown stubbles the distant sound of guns among the partridges occasionally breaks the silence, telling of the waning year.

On the tiny lawn of the cottage which Sir Charles Roylance had taken for the racing season, and which he still occupied, old Mr. Beauchamp sat in a garden chair, while radiant in her new-found peace Nance tended him with the devotion she had lavished on him since his discharge from hospital.

Father and daughter had both been Sir Charles' guests since the old man had recovered sufficiently to be removed. He had nearly got over the dreadful blow which Hooligan had dealt him in an ecstasy of rage over the duplicate circular and Tannadyce's consequent displeasure. The story was an old one now—how the ungoverned peer had strode into the office and half killed his duped partner, after rifling the drawer for his share of the profits.

And now, this afternoon, they were waiting for their host's return from London, where he had

been to attend the trial of Tannadyce and his hired accomplices on the charge of conspiring to bring about Lord Hooligan's death at the hands of Tidmarsh. The charge of inveigling Nance to the Rook's Nest had not been proceeded with, lest unnecessary scandal should be raised, Croal having behaved like a brick in the matter, completing his case in such a manner that she would not have to be called as a witness.

The only too-willing silence of the accused on that head had been purchased by the withdrawal of the minor count in the indictment, and to guard against future distortion of the story they had all been induced to sign affidavits that Nance had been hoodwinked into the brougham and afterwards detained against her will.

There was, therefore, but one issue to be fought out between the Crown and the prisoners—namely, their plot against the reprobate nobleman, who had become as a thorn in the flesh to Tannadyce by reason of his imminent arrest for Bessie Beckford's murder.

Presently the garden gate clicked, and Nance rose with a happy blush to greet her lover as he came quickly up the path.

"All over, and without a whisper affecting us," he cried cheerily. "I was honoured by a seat on the bench. Tannadyce got five years' penal servitude, Mother Fury three, and the pugilists two years' imprisonment each. Skinner, as you know, had been allowed to tender himself as King's evidence; but the singular thing is that the case would probably have broken down if it hadn't been for Moses Cohen. His testimony of what passed in the house, especially their making Hooligan drunk for the slaughter, turned the scale and told strongly against them."

"I don't like that," said Nance gravely, as Sir Charles flung himself into a low chair at her side. "It cannot have been an edifying spectacle to see a father so vindictive against his own son."

"Frankly, it was not; though the old man had been most shamefully treated," Sir Charles replied. "And he was debarred from showing himself up in the best light through not being able to mention the real reason for his presence in that horrible place—his devotion to you, dearest."

"It is worse for a child to have to put up with a wicked father than for a father to be saddled with undutiful offspring," Mr. Beauchamp sighed huskily. The ex-squire of The Grange attributed all his daughter's misfortunes to his own folly, and had been devoured by remorse ever since his generous reception by his future son-in-law. Both the young people had been doing their best to make him forget the past, and now Nance leaned over and stroked the wrinkled hand.

"What's the good of harping on painful episodes, Dad? 'Parker's Lightning Finals' were only a bad dream, and they are dead and buried for ever. Charley has forgiven us long ago, haven't you, Charley?" she murmured.

Roylance gave her a look that did not need the interpretation of words. "Something else besides 'Parker's Lightning Finals' is dead and buried," he said after a pause. "A much larger affair, and one that has a good deal to do with our future happiness. My racing stud went to the hammer yesterday, and fetched fairly good prices. I feel like a man who has been confined in a dungeon, and has suddenly had his shackles knocked off."

"Heaven be thanked for that!" Nance faltered.

"And another piece of news cropped up to-day in town. I looked in at the agent's and learned

that I have let Roylance Abbey, now happily cleared of mortgage, for a long term of years to an American manufacturer."

"Oh, Charley, that is a real sacrifice!"

"Yes; it will be a wrench to think of strangers in the dear old place, but it will be more honest than scraping on without the means to keep it up. We shall have to begin in quite a small way, little woman, and make this cottage our home—unless you prefer to go back on your promise to make me a happy man next week."

"Don't hint such a thing, even in jest," said Nance, her eyes filling with tears. "I would rather be a poor man's wife than try to bolster up a tottering fortune by the glittering sham of a life devoted to the Turf. That way ruin lies, Charley, as we both have learned very bitterly."

Sir Charles gave her hand an affectionate squeeze and looked across at the old squire, who was moodily ruminating on his own prospects. He was sorely perturbed by the consciousness that if he was unfit to be a Turf adviser he was unfit to be anything, and a future of dependency on his daughter and her husband, in their comparatively straitened circumstances, galled his pride. But it seemed that the kind-hearted young baronet had devised a way of letting him down easy.

"I've got a proposal to make to you, Mr. Beauchamp, if you can make up your mind to live with a humdrum couple," he began rather diffidently. "I don't mean to be an idle man any more. I have arranged to go into business as a tea broker, and I am told that I shall have to spend the best part of my time on 'Change. Now the question is, will you come to my assistance by helping Nance to boss the gardener and the groom here during my daily absences in town? They would be rather a handful

for her alone, with all her indoor housekeeping to attend to."

He winked at Nance half humorously, half sadly, as the blind man, with something of his old egotism, pompously agreed to a proposal made for the sole purpose of providing him with a home. Nance's grateful smile for her lover was cut short by the opening of the garden gate and the entrance of Lady Alice Mashiter—"Charley's Aunt," as Nance irreverently called her behind her back.

The grim spinster advanced with stately step and slow to the party under the mulberry tree, and suddenly ejaculated:—

"I have been grossly deceived!"

"Indeed, aunt—not so bad as that, I trust," said Sir Charles, offering her a chair, which she declined.

Ignoring his remark, she snapped out: "You two are getting married next week?"

"Well, the banns are up, and——"

"Yes, yes, I know. I've no objection to your being married—now that you're both reformed characters," interrupted the old lady. "It isn't that. It's the question of the clergyman. Mr. Quintree must not perform the ceremony. I should hardly regard you as legally married."

"Why, how's that, Aunt Alice? I thought you swore by Quintree," Sir Charles exclaimed in genuine wonder.

"I've found him out," replied Lady Alice severely. "He's a snare and a delusion, and so is Mr. Cowper Bulstrode, the churchwarden. Mr. Quintree sent me an anti-gambling tract of his composition, and inside it he had left, by mistake, a letter from a Turf accountant demanding payment of bets. I knew the writing. It was that of Mr. Butstrode, who trades under the name of Val Crooker. All I

know is that you must get another man to marry you."

With which she turned and stumped out of the garden.

* * * * *

Whether they would or no, Sir Charles and Nance were compelled to get another clergyman to tie the nuptial knot. But really it mattered nothing to the young lovers, who now in the golden autumn redeemed the pledge entered into amid the fiery ordeal of summer. For were they not setting forth on a new life, humbled, but not humiliated, by the trials of the past?

Dearly bought as was their experience, it was a small price to pay for the perfect peace of a home life unembittered by the carking cares of chronic debt, and by the transient joys of "spotting a winner."

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As for Mr. Tidmarsh, he has started as a cab-proprietor in a small way, and perhaps it says more for the sterling heart that beats under his capacious waistcoat than we have been able to bring out in our description of him, that Alf Skinner is one of his carefully chosen drivers.

"The lad has suffered a lot, and he's faithful to the hand that feeds him. Who am I to cast stones at anybody?" Mr. Tidmarsh will say when taxed

with employing a graduate from such a doubtful school.

Wherefrom it will be seen that "the greatest of these, which is charity," blossoms most freely in the most unexpected nooks.

THE END.

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